



## **Lessons Learned from Selected National Initiatives to End Child Marriage**

**July 2015**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

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*Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage* is a partnership of more than 500 civil society organisations (CSOs) from over 70 countries across Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Europe and the Americas, united by a commitment to work in partnership to end child marriage and enable girls to fulfil their potential. The Partnership aims to raise awareness of the harmful impact of child marriage by encouraging open, inclusive and informed discussion at the community, local, national and international level. *Girls Not Brides* also works to facilitate learning and coordination between organisations working to end child marriage and mobilise all necessary policy, financial and other support to end child marriage.

In the past few years there has been increasing recognition that, due to the scale, complexity and urgency of acting to address child marriage, it is crucial to move from a project-based approach to child marriage towards the development of comprehensive, country-wide initiatives. A small but growing number of countries affected by child marriage have started to develop national strategies, action plans, campaigns and other country-wide initiatives to address the practice. The African Union campaign to end child marriage is due to be launched across 30 countries over the coming years, and the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation recently launched a regional action plan to end child marriage. These developments present critical opportunities to make progress at a scale that has not yet been achieved in this field.

However, there is no consensus on what such initiatives should include and how they should be implemented to ensure a positive impact on the incidence of child marriage. It is therefore an opportune time to reflect on insights from existing national strategies across countries: why they are emerging, how they are being developed, what they include, and what the prospects are for implementation. To better understand these initiatives, and to draw lessons for use by *Girls Not Brides* members and others, the *Girls Not Brides* secretariat sought to capture experiences across four countries where different types of national initiatives have developed, i.e. Egypt, Ethiopia, Nepal and Zambia.

While it is still too early to tell the impact of these initiatives, there are some common themes emerging. We hope that the lessons learned and practical examples captured in this report will be useful to a range of actors working to develop, strengthen and implement national strategies and initiatives to address child marriage, and will prompt further discussion in this area. We hope to build on the report by supporting *Girls Not Brides* members and national partnerships to advocate for the implementation of strong national initiatives in their countries, including by developing collective recommendations on what an effective national strategy to address child marriage should entail.

This report will start by briefly introducing national strategies / country-wide initiatives in four selected countries (Section 3), and then summarise lessons and challenges which have started to emerge from those countries (Section 4 and 5). It includes some initial recommendations (Section 6), which we hope will pave the way for further discussions.

The *Girls Not Brides* secretariat would like to thank all individuals who provided feedback on the scope of this project and who were interviewed for this report, as well as the members and partners who made recommendations at *Girls Not Brides'* Global Member Meeting in May. Their input and expertise was

invaluable in drawing lessons for this report. We would also like to thank Matilda Branson for her work on this project.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

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*Girls Not Brides* contracted an independent consultant, Matilda Branson, to conduct research and interviews for the purposes of this report. The contents of this report are informed by three phases of work:

- (i) A desk review of existing literature and documentation of national strategies / country wide initiatives and telephone interviews with key informants from *Girls Not Brides* members, governments, UN agencies, and other development partners from Ethiopia, Egypt, Nepal<sup>1</sup> and Zambia (Annex A details those who were interviewed).
- (ii) Analysis and documentation of key trends and lessons learned across Ethiopia, Egypt, Nepal and Zambia.
- (iii) A session during the *Girls Not Brides* Global Member Meeting on 21 May 2015 with representatives from Egypt, Ethiopia, Nepal and Zambia on lessons learned, and small group discussions with 50 participants from 15 countries to develop recommendations for process, content and implementation of national strategies (see Annex B for the session overview).

The report was finalised by the *Girls Not Brides* secretariat in July 2015. For further information about its contents, please contact [Ellen.Travers@GirlsNotBrides](mailto:Ellen.Travers@GirlsNotBrides), Head of Learning at *Girls Not Brides* or [Francoise.Moudouthe@GirlsNotBrides.org](mailto:Francoise.Moudouthe@GirlsNotBrides.org), Head of Africa Engagement at *Girls Not Brides*.

## 3. OVERVIEW OF SELECTED NATIONAL STRATEGIES ON CHILD MARRIAGE

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National strategies or country-wide initiatives to address child marriage have begun to emerge in a number of countries, including Egypt, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Nepal, Togo, Uganda and Zambia. The four countries selected for this report were those which had strategies which were either already launched, or were very close to finalisation. With the exception of Zambia, all countries had developed specific strategy documents to guide the government's work. While Zambia didn't develop a national strategy per se, the nature of the country-wide campaign in Zambia presented interesting lessons to capture. This section will briefly introduce the four selected country initiatives before highlighting commonalities and differences among them. Further information about each country experience can be found in Annex C.

### (a) *Egypt's National Strategy to Prevent Child Marriage*

Between November 2013 and June 2014 the National Population Council (NPC), the governmental body which establishes national population policies and strategies in Egypt, spearheaded the development of a national strategy to prevent child marriage. The strategy emerged partially in response to conservative forces at work at the time seeking to significantly lower the legal age of marriage for girls and partially as an element of the wider National Population and Development Strategy of the NPC. Launched in 2014 with a five-year timeframe, the strategy aims to reduce the prevalence of child marriage by 50% focusing on

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<sup>1</sup> Due to the earthquake in Nepal in April 2015, it was not possible to conduct interviews as planned. Some examples from the Nepali experience have nevertheless been included based on our knowledge from previous discussions with stakeholders and discussions with representatives from Nepal during the Global Member Meeting.

geographic areas with the highest rates or increasing trends of child marriage. It includes a results-based implementation plan, and is currently in its first phase of implementation.

**(b) Ethiopia’s National Strategy and Action Plan on Harmful Traditional Practices against Women and Children in Ethiopia**

Ethiopia’s approach to addressing child marriage is part of a broader initiative that aims to address harmful traditional practices affecting women (including child marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting - FGM/C). The country’s national strategy emerged in the context of Ethiopia’s aim to reach middle income country status and create better opportunities for women and girls as part of the country’s development. Under the leadership of the federal Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs (MoWCYA), its development began in 2011 and was officially launched in June 2013 with a two-year action plan to guide its implementation. The government reinforced its commitment at the Girl Summit in London committing to end child marriage and FGM/C by 2025, and held a follow-up Ethiopian Girl Summit in June 2015 to discuss implementation of the strategy and commitments made.

**(c) Nepal’s National Strategy to End Child Marriage**

The government of Nepal under the leadership of the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare (MoWCSW) developed its strategy to end child marriage between March 2014 and January 2015. The process was supported financially and technically by UNICEF and *Girls Not Brides Nepal* and included a literature review, district and national level consultations with stakeholders from across sectors, formative research in six districts with high child marriage rates, and validation meetings to identify strategic directions and best interventions to prevent child marriage. The government committed at the Girl Summit to strive to end child marriage by 2020. Due to the recent earthquake, it is unclear when the strategy will be adopted.

**(d) Zambia’s National Campaign to End Child Marriage**

In April 2013, the government of Zambia initiated a three-year national campaign to end child marriage, spearheaded by the Ministry of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs (MoCTA). The campaign involves 10 other line ministries, and is supported by international donors including DFID, the Ford Foundation, the Graça Machel Trust, UNICEF, UNFPA and USAID. When it was initiated, the key objectives of Zambia’s campaign were to empower traditional leaders to become champions and agents of change in their chiefdoms and to amend relevant laws and policies to ensure that girls are legally protected from child marriage. The scope of its campaign is now broadening and a five-year national plan of action is being developed to guide the implementation of multi-sectoral interventions.

A number of commonalities and differences across country initiatives are worth noting:

| Issue                                   | Commonalities   | Differences   |
|---|---|---|
| <b>Impetus for strategy development</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>International and regional momentum has helped to galvanise action and movement towards the development of comprehensive national strategies to address child marriage.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Approaches to address child marriage differed across countries: sometimes as part of an effort to serve a larger purpose, like in Ethiopia or Egypt, and sometimes where ending child marriage was the goal in and of itself,</li> </ul> |

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
|   |   | like in Nepal or Zambia.   |
| <b>Stage of development</b>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In all cases, it is too early to tell what impact the strategies will have in the lives of girls. Certainly they have mobilised public support and interest in the issue. However, even the older strategies are slow to show tangible impact as they are only two years old and in the early stages of implementation.</li> <li>• We understand that none of the national strategies have yet been costed with line items allocated for implementation.</li> <li>• However, all countries committed some funds to the strategy development processes to varying extents.</li> <li>• Most of the financial support for developing these strategies came from increased donor investment in the issue with technical support coming from UN agencies, especially UNICEF, INGOs, and partnerships of civil society organisations.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The countries reviewed are at very different stages in their work to address child marriage: Ethiopia’s strategy is the oldest, launched over two years ago (in 2013), Egypt’s was launched one year ago (in 2014), while Nepal’s strategy was developed in 2014 and is currently stalled following the earthquake. Zambia’s approach was quite different in nature, first starting out with a campaign and then later moving towards development of a national action plan.</li> <li>• Egypt and Ethiopia both had action plans and monitoring platforms that were part of the strategy, whereas Nepal and Zambia planned to develop these in 2015.</li> <li>• The differing political and development contexts across countries have implications for how strategies roll out and merit further consideration.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Content and process of development</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>All strategies include ambitious timeframes for action for addressing child marriage:</b> In Ethiopia, this is to eliminate child marriage by 2025. In Nepal, it is somewhat ambitiously to strive to eliminate child marriage by 2020. Egypt’s strategy plans to reduce the prevalence of child marriage by 50% by the end of the five-year plan by focusing on geographic areas with the highest rates or areas with increasing trends of child marriage.</li> <li>• <b>Egypt, Ethiopia and Nepal strategies all outline the need for multi-sectoral work to both prevent child marriage</b> (e.g. keeping girls in secondary school as a protective mechanism) <b>and respond to the consequences of child marriage</b> (e.g. strengthening child protection referral</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The process of developing national strategies has involved varying levels of consultation with different stakeholders in different countries.</b> The extent of consultation with non-governmental stakeholders varied and was dependent on the government or institution leading the process, and how receptive it is to input from non-government actors.</li> </ul>   |

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|--|--|--|
|  | systems to address cases of child marriage or gender-based violence , and providing support and services for married girls). |  |
|--|--|--|

## 4. LESSONS LEARNED

It is too early to tell what longer-term impact many of these initiatives will have. However, some initial lessons about the development, contents and implementation of these initiatives emerged across the four countries during the interviews and we expect more to surface with time. This section captures these insights. Not all countries followed these; in some cases they emerged as recommendations or lessons for how work could be strengthened.

### i. Government leadership and ownership must be the starting point

#### Key lessons

- The success of a national strategy ultimately hinges on the strength, leadership, commitment, organisation and capacity of a government. Without strong leadership or political will, any efforts to tackle child marriage multi-sectorally will not and cannot reach scale.

Across the four countries, the government led and owned the process of developing a national strategy or campaign on child marriage, and made the issue a priority on the government agenda. That ownership is important in sending a signal of the importance of addressing child marriage for the government and can help to unlock doors for discussing how existing governmental initiatives could be strengthened to address child marriage and support married girls.

#### Country profiles: where did the leadership lie?

**Zambia:** Ministry of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs

**Nepal:** Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare, as part of its mandate under its regional membership the South Asia Initiative to End Violence against Children

**Ethiopia:** Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs

**Egypt:** Ministry of Population and National Population Council

Having government champions can also help to mobilise support within government, and demonstrate public commitment to working on an issue which has long been absent from national development agendas. In Zambia, the value of the leadership being with the Ministry of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs was the direct link to decision makers (traditional chiefs) at the community level, which helped to link the government commitment to commitment at the village level.

In practice, across all countries, there was some form of inter-ministerial steering committee or consultative group with other ministries which contributed to the strategy development process. How successful that collaboration worked in practice seemed to depend somewhat on the personality and leadership of Ministers driving the issue forward.

An issue which consistently came up during the interviews was the importance of maintaining governmental interest in the issue once the strategy or initiative has been launched. Interviewees mentioned the important role for civil society collaboration in keeping the issue on government agendas and the value of

international events like the Girl Summit to help maintain government interest in the issue and to give international recognition to government leaders taking action on child marriage.

## ii. Inclusive and participatory strategy development processes help foster longer term impact

### Key lessons

- An inclusive participatory process is necessary to include vital perspectives and capture the complexity of interventions needed to tackle child marriage.
- Such a process also contributes to building a national movement to end child marriage and is critical for longer-term sustainability.

Developing a holistic national strategy to address child marriage that will have ownership from all necessary stakeholders with diverse interests and agendas can be a lengthy and complex process. The alternative – employing a consultancy firm to develop a strategy in three or four months – might seem like more time and cost efficient. From the four country experiences, it was not clear whether an extensive participatory process alone enhances the overall quality and content of a strategy document.

However, two major reasons why a meaningful participatory process is important emerged from interviews: First, without input from all stakeholders on an issue as complex as child marriage, especially those affected directly, there is the risk of missing vital perspectives for interventions. Second, an inclusive participatory process contributes to building consensus and support for a national movement working together to end child marriage both within government and among wider stakeholders. It helps to include people in the process in such a way that they have a vested interest in a strategy's progress and ensures the same messages are being disseminated to everyone. It also helps to mobilise all sectors and actors to include child marriage into their regular programming and link their work with existing platforms and systems. Interviewees felt that local ownership was crucial. Involvement, buy-in and acceptance of interventions at the community level are critical for sustainability.

Two main approaches emerged as ways to ensure a meaningful participatory process:

- (i) **A small working group / advisory group** of key technical people from across organisations and sectors to provide technical expertise to the government's steering committee. A few practical tips which interviewees recommended include:
- Ensure the lead Ministry chairs the group.
  - Involve the government in the identification of key technical people to build respect and trust for the

#### Process Owners in Egypt

In Egypt, to ensure people were meaningfully involved in the strategy development process, sub-committees were developed on specific technical aspects of the strategy like (a) legal issues (b) sectoral technical issues – health, education, economic development (c) financial challenges (working with Ministry of Finance and other bodies to ensure funding for implementation) and (d) social and religious challenges (working with cultural norms, the media, etc.). They were dubbed “process owners” and took responsibility for a certain part of the strategy development. It helped to foster ownership because they facilitated the process and made sure that the implementers on the ground were contributing and that these contributions would be taken into consideration. It helped, for example, that they could cite specific parts of the strategy that they had contributed to.

group's role and expertise. This can facilitate their early review of relevant elements of the strategy, helping to enhance its quality, as well as their own vested interests in the strategy.

- Ensure participants are committed, knowledgeable, active listeners with time to fully participate in the group.
- Ensure organisations take responsibility for consistent representation and handover between representatives to avoid wasting valuable time bringing people up to speed
- Put in place a small secretariat to support administrative coordination (preparing meeting agendas, minutes, sending follow ups, reminders to meet deadlines for feedback, etc.)

**(ii) A wider stakeholder group engaged from the beginning of the strategy development process.**

The value of large-scale meetings with a wide range of stakeholders was highlighted as a way to mobilise and inform stakeholders about the strategy development process. Interviewees noted that such large meetings meant that opportunities for stakeholders' productive input into the strategy can be minimal so it was important to plan for smaller sector, interest group or organisation-specific consultations at different times to receive that feedback. In the smaller consultations it was critical that the facilitator tailors and plans the session for the specific audience (e.g. a consultation with a group of adolescents would be facilitated very differently to a consultation with government officials) with clear meeting objectives and expected outcomes defined. It was also important to consider how different groups operate and how best to communicate with them in a sensitive way.

**Building a Movement in Zambia**

In July 2014, a Child Marriage Symposium was organised in Zambia bringing stakeholders from all ten Zambian provinces, including government representatives, former / current child brides, traditional leaders, Alangizi (traditional counsellors), traditional healers, academic, civil society organisations, youth, media, UN agencies and development partners. The value of such a large public convening was the demonstration of a strong cross-governmental commitment to tackling the issue (10 Cabinet Ministers committed to taking action). It was also an important opportunity for other stakeholders to come together and led to the creation of a national network of NGOs against child marriages.

There was consensus among interviewees that change does not happen overnight. Interviewees mentioned that local champions – for example, girls who refuse to marry early, boys who refuse dowry or marriage to an underage girl, fathers and mothers who keep their daughters in school against the odds – are important as both role models for others and as change agents at the community level from which development organisations need to learn from. As governments think about their approach to inclusiveness, it is important to consider how to create champions for change within communities who could help to implement the strategy, and in addition to find ways to ensure that the voices of young people, and especially those affected, are included in the development of national strategies.

**iii. Integrated, multi-sectorial responses are needed to end child marriage**

**Key lessons**

- Child marriage requires multi-sectoral engagement; strategies for engaging different sectors should be tailored to their interests and priorities.

Across the four countries a common call came for an integrated multi-sectoral approach to child marriage, especially to make progress on a much larger scale. Interviews seemed to suggest that many non-government actors were already integrating child marriage into their work, or were willing to do so, but integrating child marriage across government sectors was more challenging. A strong call emerged for key ministries whose mandate relates to child marriage to include ending child marriage as an explicit objective (with relevant indicators) in their own policies and initiatives (e.g. child protection, law enforcement, social protection, education, health and gender among others). In many cases, they may already be implementing programmes which indirectly contribute to the prevention of child marriage but it is not explicit so the impact is not being tracked. Given that lead ministries of a national strategy's development (which tend to be Ministries of Women, Gender, Children, Traditional Affairs, Social Welfare and similar), are usually the least-funded, and with the least influence and capacity for implementation of all line ministries, it is critical to engage other ministries to play their role in tackling child marriage. While many countries established inter-ministerial steering groups, it is unclear how well this collaboration has worked in practice.

To integrate child marriage across sectors, we heard how “speaking the language” of different ministries and institutions is critical, particularly when working with those who are not traditionally responsible for or involved in children and women’s issues (e.g. the Ministry of Finance). Knowing how they operate and how information on child marriage should be communicated to get the desired result or engagement is critical. Interviewees mentioned that if trying to work with different line ministries, it is important to send the right people – those who are respected by ministry officials, who are trusted and known to have sectoral expertise – to speak about integrating child marriage into the ministry’s existing work, services and systems. As trusted experts, their message is all the more powerful and more likely to be taken on board by line ministries.

#### **Engaging the Ministry of Finance in Nepal**

In Nepal, figures and budgets were used when speaking to the Ministry of Finance from the beginning of the process. A “Cost of Inaction on Child Marriage” was presented showing that failure to address child marriage in Nepal had cost the country 3.87% of its Gross Domestic Product. The Ministry of Finance then played an active role in the strategy development process providing strategic support on both national-level planning and budgeting across ministries, and pointing out allocations available for child marriage through local government mechanisms.

#### **iv. Coordination and communication can help to build alignment about what needs to be done to end child marriage and maximise impact**

##### **Key lessons**

- Strong collaboration and coordination, and open communication, can help to build alignment across sectors and stakeholders.

An important lesson highlighted by interviewees was the need for coordination and alignment among different stakeholders across sectors. Many said that despite repeated calls for increased collaboration and coordination across sectors, it seemed that efforts to address child marriage at country level have remained splintered, uncoordinated and sporadic. Despite many actors working towards the same end goal of ending child marriage, they continue to work in their traditional silos and often on a small scale separate from the government.

Many said that duplications occur because it is easier to work in sectoral silos, within one's own organisation and sector, and with one's most tried-and-tested partners. For day-to-day work and administratively, the consensus was that it is simply much easier. It takes time, energy, patience and huge amounts of coordination to work with others on joint work plans and proposals, and working democratically in partnership means it can take longer to reach consensus and take decisions to move work forward. However, it was generally thought that without coordination and collaboration between NGOs, the result will be duplication of efforts, exclusion of different actors from processes and consultations, competition over limited funding opportunities for child marriage, and general confusion throughout the country's development sector.

#### **International days as an opportunity to align messaging and events**

In practice there are often multiple events on child marriage held on days like International Day of the Girl Child or International Women's Day. One interviewee asked, "Wouldn't the impact of one huge advocacy event between stakeholders to demand more action on child marriage send a stronger message to the government, rather than three smaller ones by three different organisations?". International days in that sense can provide opportunities for aligning messaging and events. For civil society organisations who wish to influence the content of national strategies or priorities of national action plans, coordinating messaging and events to create a unified voice can be very powerful and maximise impact.

Similarly, without linking to government initiatives, it will not be possible to reach the scale that is needed to effectively address child marriage. In this sense, national action plans and monitoring frameworks were seen as critical for mapping out ways of working and consolidating efforts, as well as mechanisms for accountability. Clear communication on the development and implementation of the national strategy, action plan, and roles and responsibilities of different actors is critical, especially when more people have a vested interest in the strategy and want to know how it is progressing.

## **v. The content of national strategies should be informed by evidence**

### **Key lessons:**

- Research and evidence about the prevalence and context of child marriage, and what works to address it, should inform national strategies and initiatives.

All countries conducted formative research and literature reviews on the prevalence, context and drivers of child marriage, as well as interventions to address it, which informed their strategies. The research helped to identify areas of high prevalence (in terms of geographic location / vulnerable communities), as well as the most effective ways of working at different levels (policy / services / community) to prevent child marriage. Interviewees mentioned the value of a participatory approach to developing a national strategy and consulting community based organisations on strategies needed because it helps to surface strategies that work and don't work.

In addition to informing the national strategy, research and evidence available should also inform the prioritisation of approaches within the national strategy or action plan. It is important that the real barriers

and root causes of child marriage are taken into account. For example, while it may be tempting to see legal reform as a quick fix solution, it is also important to recognise the underlying social norms that often drive the practice and which must be addressed to make progress.

Finally, interviewees mentioned the importance of looking beyond what can be seen as the traditional paradigm of child marriage: parents forcing their young daughters to marry much older men. They said that there are also new and challenging ways the practice must be understood within national strategies if the practice is to end.

#### **Self-initiated child marriages in Nepal and Zambia**

In Nepal, increasing trends – as high as 50% in some districts – showed girls and boys under 18 years choosing “love” and “self-initiated” marriage. In Zambia, interviewees mentioned increasing trends of self-initiated marriages by girls and boys that end in divorce and separation (and often unwanted pregnancies) one or two years later, and that in some communities parents are “in awe of other parents who manage to keep their daughters in school.” Both initiatives sought to find solutions which would respond to these contexts by including young girls’ and boys’ empowerment.

## **5. CHALLENGES**

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Developing multi-sectoral strategies to address child marriage is not without its challenges. A number of specific challenges which emerged most frequently from our interviews are included below.

### **i. Balancing limited time-frames with consultative processes**

A common question which arose was how to balance the need to produce a multi-sectoral strategy document in a limited timeframe with having everyone involved. As one interviewee mentioned, managing a strategy’s development is like managing a large peer review with so many diverse interests and agendas. It may involve coordination of up to 10 government ministries, as well as local non-governmental organisations, international non-governmental organisations, UN agencies, donors, law enforcement, the media, religious and traditional leaders, community-based organisations, academia and adolescents and young people themselves.

In addition, inclusiveness beyond the capital and beyond the usual suspects of organisations commonly involved in such processes presents a challenge. Some groups that were important but may have been overlooked in countries’ strategy development processes included adolescent girls (including those already-married), adolescent or young boys, traditional and religious leaders, the private sector, and stakeholders at the provincial and district levels, particularly those in areas known to have high child marriage prevalence.

Some interviewees mentioned that lots of consultations meant it was possible to reach a saturation point of stakeholders’ inputs for the strategy, with the same recommendations and comments coming up, time and time again. However, this was seen as a good sign. The value of reaching such a point was that if enough people were consulted from across sectors (from grassroots to national level) and voicing similar thoughts on child marriage (e.g. “Keeping girls in secondary school will help prevent their early marriage”), such recommendations could then be merged with the evidence base to serve as a basis for strategic interventions.

## **ii. Moving from talk to action: operationalising national strategies**

There was general consensus from interviewees that now is the time for concrete tangible action on child marriage. They mentioned the many high-level events over the past few years designed to raise the profile and agenda of child marriage both nationally and internationally and a lot of talk about acting to end child marriage. However, there is a growing sense of impatience that real action is needed beyond the advocacy and policy level, and without costed action plans across countries, there were concerns about operationalising these strategies.

Many countries seem to be in a position where the evidence is already available on what interventions work best and how to take these to scale. However practical difficulties of coordination, allocating different roles and responsibilities, budget allocation, lines of accountability and similar, have stalled progress.

For countries beginning strategy development processes, it was suggested that some sort of Action Plan or Implementation Plan, with an accompanying Monitoring Framework to monitor progress be developed as part of a strategy, not after, so as to demonstrate the immediate next steps for action. In reality, the implementation of a comprehensive multi-sectoral strategy that tackles child marriage is costly, and requires far more human and financial resources, and capacity than governments seem to have currently. Interviewees mentioned that the costing of national action plans is necessary in order to put an economic value on the cost of action for ending child marriage but challenging because governments often lack the technical expertise and have to outsource.

## **iii. Determining priorities**

While there was broad consensus across countries about the need for a comprehensive approach to addressing child marriage in national strategies, some interviewees expressed concern about transforming what seems like a wish list of multi-sectoral interventions into reality given resource restraints.

Some interviewees suggested their government bring in a phased approach of interventions; they said that this could involve focusing in the short-term on one or two aspects of strategic interventions deemed most effective (one interviewee mentioned that the evidence base and government leadership could help to identify/prioritise those aspects, though it would be important to emphasise that the interventions are “short-term” priorities only and feed into a wider multi-sectoral approach). Other interviewees suggested the short-term focus could be on addressing the legal aspects of child marriage (e.g. harmonising inconsistencies in laws, publicising, and enforcing the legal age of marriage). Another approach suggested was to implement the entire raft of multi-sectoral interventions on a smaller scale in areas of the country with high child marriage prevalence (e.g. in identified “hotspot” communities or regions).

Generally interviewees felt that whatever the approach, it should be informed by evidence of what is most effective and most needed to address child marriage in the country. There were calls for governments to be clearer about their next steps for implementation and country-wide interventions in concrete terms.

#### iv. Sustainability of child marriage work

Interviewees repeatedly mentioned that child marriage is, in a sense, the “exciting development item” in 2014 and 2015. However there was a common concern that child marriage, like many “of the moment” issues in development will lose prominence after a few years. Interviewees emphasised the importance of linking child marriage to a broader agenda of girl’s empowerment and gender equality in society overall to ensure its sustainability. While there is strong acceptance that child marriage needs to be approached in a multi-sectoral and holistic way, as yet within strategies the explicit link between the immediate goal to reduce/eradicate child marriage and the broader goal to empower girls and achieve gender equality overall in society, and the pathways of how to achieve this change at that higher level, were not so clear.

#### v. Leaving no girls behind

Interviewees mentioned that, in an ideal world, when a strategy and action plan is complete, a country’s government would then implement a raft of multi-sectoral interventions through existing (and hopefully strengthened) systems and mechanisms, with outreach to the majority of girls in a country.

However, they noted that such interventions may miss those girls most at risk of child marriage - girls who are already married, and girls who are the simply the hardest to reach and most vulnerable. Interviewees mentioned that these girls may be hardest to reach in terms of:

- (a) Geographical location (e.g. remote rural areas);
- (b) They may be part of a traditionally closed-off community where child marriage is rife, but where there is no history or knowledge of how best to work with that community;
- (c) They may be girls who are out-of-school, or were never in school;
- (d) They may be migrant child labourers, trafficked or exploited girls; or
- (e) They may be girls who do not legally exist, because their births and marriages were never registered so they cannot access government services.

Interviewees mentioned the vital role of civil society and non-government actors in finding out how best to reach these girls because in many cases the government does not or cannot reach them. They emphasised that while scale and cost-effectiveness are important in program planning, such girls are equally important. Consequently civil society actors will always have an important role to advocate on behalf of these girls and work to ensure that no girl slips through the cracks.

## 6. COMPILATION OF EMERGING RECOMMENDATIONS

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This section gathers and compiles recommendations which emerged from discussions with key informants in Egypt, Ethiopia, Nepal and Zambia, as well as from small group discussions at the Global Member Meeting in May. The recommendations relate to both process for developing national strategies, as well as the content of national strategies.

The recommendations are not intended to be exhaustive. Rather they are a starting point and a basis for future discussion. As this was the first collective discussion among *Girls Not Brides* members across countries on this issue, we intend to refine and elaborate these recommendations in further detail over the coming

months. In the meantime, they offer some initial reflections for government, civil society, donors, UN agencies, community-based organisations and other development organisations for developing a strong national strategy.

**1. Work together across sectors in the development and implementation of national strategies.**

Coordinate, collaborate, share resources, and plan together across sectors. Only then will the full complexity of child marriage be understood and appropriate interventions identified to tackle child marriage in a holistic and comprehensive way.

**2. Invest time and resources in strategies and their operationalisation.** Invest time (multi-year strategy interventions) and resources (technical and financial) to produce sustained change, and work to understand why and how that change has occurred, and how it can be replicated and taken to scale. Integrate monitoring and accountability mechanisms which are realistic into these strategies from an early stage.

**3. Include all stakeholders.** Everyone has a role to play in developing a comprehensive and multi-sectoral national strategy that is implementable. This means carefully planning how to facilitate the meaningful inclusion of different stakeholders:

- Married girls, to ensure services available to them are appropriate to their needs;
- Young girls and boys, to inform interventions most relevant to them, and to nurture young leadership development and the development of young people as responsible citizens;
- Men and boys, to design effective messages to change attitudes towards child marriage and raise the perceived value of girls more generally;
- Religious and traditional leaders, to help develop their capacity and access to correct and appropriate information, tools and resources for working to end child marriage, given their important role as community gatekeepers;
- The media, to raise awareness about the strategy, the issue of child marriage, and ethically monitor and report on its implementation;
- Law enforcement authorities, to raise awareness, train and educate police and law enforcement officials about laws on child marriage, the rights of girls, and how to respond appropriately to cases of child marriage, associated harmful traditional practices and cases of violence;
- The private sector and business, to inform interventions that provide economic support and incentives (e.g. microenterprise, livelihoods skills, etc.) for girls and their families to reduce financial incentives to marry girls off.

**4. Allocate budget towards child marriage.** Ensure and advocate for the Cabinet (or government equivalent) to allocate and provide strong leadership across line ministries for the necessary budget allocation for child marriage interventions in governmental structures at national and sub-national levels.

**5. Engage with government in the implementation of the strategy:** It is critical for all non-government actors to link and coordinate their own child marriage work with the government where possible. If the government is not interested, there is the need to advocate to policy makers on the issue. It might take longer but government buy-in and leadership is crucial to take interventions to scale.

- 6. Always use evidence.** Both to inform the strategy development, and to ensure interventions being developed have been tried and tested for effectiveness. This includes:
- **Strengthening data collection.** Improve and synchronise data collection and monitoring systems to strengthen the knowledge base on girls most at risk of child marriage and already-married girls.
  - **Measure impact carefully.** Support relevant actors – government, NGOs, community-based organisations, research agencies and implementing partners – in measuring the impact of interventions. This means giving thought to and allocating funds towards baselines (and indicators) at the very beginning of an intervention so as to be able to respond to questions later about the impact of the intervention, any unintended / harmful consequences, its sustainability, and its ability to be replicated in other contexts or taken to scale. This clarity is important for monitoring and evaluating results, particularly in the short-term when governments or donors may be expecting results within short timeframes
  - **Document lessons learned.** Reflect on and document lessons learned to inform future interventions, including what does not work – this is particularly pertinent for interventions that aim to change deeply entrenched social norms. Equally, document best practices, protective social norms and positive deviants that can be learned from and strengthened (individual champions/role models, as well as examples of institutional positive deviance e.g. child marriage free provinces).
- 7. Build capacity at the sub-national level.** Support the capacity development of community-based organisations, civil society organisations and local governance structures working on child marriage issues with the appropriate resources (technical and financial).
- 8. Ensure sustainability.** Link child marriage issues with a broader agenda on girls’ empowerment and gender equality (e.g. the Sustainable Development Goals) to ensure its sustainability on the development agenda in years to come.

Throughout many discussions, the principle of doing no harm was highlighted as particularly important for work which aims to address child marriage. As priorities are defined and resources are allocated towards the development and implementation of national strategies, it will be particularly important that strategies and initiatives use interventions that are evidence-based, sensible and that address the root causes of child marriage, without doing more harm than good.

## 7. CONCLUSION

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The development of multi-sectoral national strategies in countries with high prevalence rates of child marriage presents an unprecedented opportunity to coordinate efforts of stakeholders to maximise impact for girls. The coming years will be a pivotal turning point for the international community in putting multi-sectoral collaboration on this issue into practice.

Through this project, a number of clear needs and opportunities for the way forward emerged:

- Better monitoring, documentation and communication about national strategies in development or existence in different countries.
- Further technical and financial support from the international community for the development and implementation of national strategies is needed. This should include guidance on what makes an

effective national strategy to address child marriage.

- Further research and analysis on specific issues such as underlying motivations for the development of strategies, costing and financing of national strategies, and examples of multi-sectoral collaboration in practice.
- Increased evaluation of what works at scale to address child marriage.
- Increased partnership and coordination among organisations working to address child marriage at country level.

The lessons learned included in this report are a starting point; no doubt more will emerge with time. Continuing to critically reflect on the progress of these national strategies will be important for our collective efforts to achieve maximum scale and impact to make a difference in the lives of girls around the world.

The *Girls Not Brides* secretariat hopes to build on this report by using some of the lessons emerging to support *Girls Not Brides* members and national partnerships to advocate for the implementation of strong national initiatives in their countries. We also hope that it will be a useful starting point for developing recommendations about what an effective national strategy to address child marriage should entail.

## ANNEX A: LIST OF KEY INFORMANTS

Names are disclosed or not as per respondents' wishes.

|                            | Name  | Position  | Organisation  |
|----------------------------|---|---|---|
| <b>EGYPT</b>               | Gamal El-Khatib - TBC   | Project Manager   | Pathfinder Egypt  |
|                            | Dr. Lamiaa Mohsen   | Professor of Pediatrics and Neonatology                 | Cairo University  |
|                            | Fatma Geel  | Director of Coordination and Foreign Agreements         | NPC   |
| <b>ETHIOPIA</b>            | Undisclosed   |   | National Alliance to End Child Marriage                 |
|                            | Ali Gimba   |   | EGLDAM  |
|                            | Djanabou Mahonde  | Chief, Child Protection                                 | UNICEF Ethiopia   |
|                            | Mieraf Mergia   | Social Development Adviser                              | DFID Ethiopia   |
|                            | Wubalem Negash  | Secretariat of the Alliance to End Child Marriage       | Ethiopian Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs |
| <b>NEPAL</b>               | <i>Due to the earthquake in Nepal it was not possible to interview respondents as planned. However we have included examples based on our knowledge from previous discussions with stakeholders and discussions with Nepali members at the Global Member Meeting.</i> |   |   |
| <b>ZAMBIA</b>              | Mercy Chabu Ngoma   | Head of Strategy Programs                               | Plan International Zambia                               |
|                            | Maud Droogleever Fortuyn  | Chief, Child Protection                                 | UNICEF Zambia   |
|                            | Kumar Gupta   | Head of Office  | Canadian High Commission to Zambia                      |
|                            | Sibeso Mululuma   | Assistant Representative                                | UNFPA Zambia  |
|                            | Valerie Roberts   | Social Development Adviser/Gender Advisor               | DFID Zambia   |
|                            | Precious Zandonda   | Gender Officer and Focal Person for Youth/Communication | UNFPA Zambia  |
| <b>TOTAL PARTICIPANTS:</b> |   |   | 14  |

## **ANNEX B: SUMMARY OF *GIRLS NOT BRIDES* GLOBAL MEMBER MEETING SESSION**

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### **Overview of discussion**

At the Global Members Meeting in May 2015, 50 participants from across 15 countries came together to discuss emerging national level strategies and country-wide initiatives to address child marriage<sup>2</sup> and reflect on the quality of these plans. Representatives from civil society organisations / national partnerships in Egypt, Mozambique, Nepal and Zambia participated in a panel discussion to reflect on developments in their countries. Lessons from preliminary findings from the research commissioned by *Girls Not Brides* into the development of national strategies were also shared. Participants brainstormed collective recommendations for the process, content and implementation of national strategies. The outcomes will be incorporated into the lessons learned report by the *Girls Not Brides* secretariat and circulated. Participants agreed to continue to reflect on and share lessons learned from their countries. A number of areas for future discussion were highlighted including: what minimum content should be included within national strategies, and what should key indicators for success be. Key themes from the discussion have been summarised below.

### **Panellists:**

- Mercy L. Chabu, Plan International, Zambia
- Anand Tamang, CRHEPA, *Girls Not Brides Nepal*
- Gamal El Khatib, Pathfinder, Egypt
- Albino Francisco, ROSC, *Girls Not Brides Mozambique*
- Ellen Travers, *Girls Not Brides* secretariat

### **Creating momentum and ownership at the national level**

The importance of strong government leadership which demonstrates a willingness to own and prioritise the issue of child marriage was highlighted across all countries. In both Nepal and Egypt, the government has led the process and their role has been critical in driving the strategy forward. In Zambia, the national strategy was spearheaded by the Ministry of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs, who are well positioned to provide leadership in a country where child marriage is a deeply engrained social norm, and the engagement of traditional leaders is key to ending the practice. Where the process has been funded and developed by development partners and civil society, concerns were raised about the level of commitment shown by the government and the amount of internal resources allocated to allow for sustainable implementation.

### **Role of civil society**

In each example shared, the role of civil society has been integral to the development of the national strategy. In Nepal, while the process is owned by the government and funded by UNICEF, civil society have been able to carve out a central role. For example, civil society organisations have carried out critical research with local communities to provide information on the drivers of child marriage which has helped to shape the strategy and illustrate the ineffectiveness of Nepal's laws prohibiting child marriage. In Zambia, civil society have been instrumental in initiating the development of the national strategy and have worked to make the process consultative with a technical committee set up to provide input into the content. The national coalition of NGOs in Zambia is also supporting the development of the strategy and ensuring good coordination with civil society. Similarly in Egypt, while the government and the National Population Council

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<sup>2</sup> Detailed information on each country's national strategy is available on the *Girls Not Brides* [resource centre](#).

led the process, a whole range of civil society organisations inputted into the strategy creating a sense of ownership and shared responsibility between actors.

### **Context specific strategies**

The importance of developing strategies which respond to the local context was particularly pertinent in the examples from Egypt and Nepal. In Egypt, the strategy and action plan was developed to be flexible giving communities and districts the opportunity to conduct activities based on local needs. In Nepal, the research carried out by civil society organisations was integral to shaping the national strategy and understanding the local drivers of child marriage. It also had the added value of providing a foundation on which community conversations around the issue of child marriage could be initiated. Both Nepal and Mozambique highlighted how they have used the *Girls Not Brides* Theory of Change as a foundation from which to adapt and develop their country specific strategies.

### **Implementation**

In all four presentations, the complexities in making the transition between developing a national strategy through to its implementation were explored. Six months after the strategy was finalised in Egypt, partners are still working to ensure that it is integrated within existing government strategies and that funding from future budgets is available to ensure effective and sustainable implementation. In Nepal, the launch has been delayed due to the earthquake which has limited the government's and civil society's capacity to implement the strategy over immediate relief efforts. Although the strategies in Zambia and Mozambique have made the issue of child marriage a priority for the government, sustaining momentum to move from talk to action and ensuring the financial and resource challenges are adequately addressed will be crucial if implementation is to be successful and sustainable. Other challenges highlighted include balancing ambitious and realistic timeframes, determining priorities and implementing multi sectoral interventions.

### **Recommendations from group work**

After the presentations, participants split into small groups and brainstormed recommendations on process, content and implementation of national strategies. Some of the ideas emerging included:

#### **(A) Recommendations for process of national strategies:**

- Inclusion of key stakeholders
- International organisations like UNFPA and UNICEF needed for technical support
- National actors needed for ownership
- CSOs must take advantage of opportunities – coalitions can be useful for this
- Transparency, including clarity about what the process is
- Accountability
- Clearly defined roles - who to include and what role do they play?

#### **(B) Recommendations for content of national strategies:**

- Integrate prevention aspects of child marriage into strategies (information, communication, advocacy, translation of texts into national languages, put in place monitoring and alert mechanisms, education of girls & boys)
- Holistic support for victims and survivors (psycho-social, economic, sanitary, legal, justice)

- Reinforce national mechanisms (State budget, strengthen capacity, harmonisation of laws, coordination & partnership, address inconsistencies between laws)

**(C) Recommendations for implementation of national strategies:**

- Make it a participatory process and include implementers in the process (incl. community leaders)
- Develop an action plan and allocate necessary resources to implement it
- Inter-governmental coordination
- A percentage of time of those involved in the process should be dedicated to this
- Gender and human rights based approaches / gender equality lens
- Media and trainings
- Use existing committees and government programmes
- Instigate community mobilisation around the problem
- Improve the legal framework

### Country fact sheet: Ethiopia

Ethiopia's approach to addressing child marriage is part of a broader initiative that aims to address harmful traditional practices affecting women (including child marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting - FGM/C). It is guided by a National Strategy and Action Plan on Harmful Traditional Practices against Women and Children, which was launched in 2013. The government committed to further action at the Girl Summit in 2014 and plans to hold a Girl Summit in Ethiopia in 2015 to discuss implementation.

#### Child marriage prevalence and context

- 41% of women aged 20-24 years are married by the age of 18, and 16% by the age of 15.<sup>4</sup>
- Child marriage prevalence varies greatly by region, but is highest in Amhara Region (44.8%), followed by Tigray (34.1%), Benishangul Gumuz (31.9%) and Addis Ababa (32.3%).<sup>5</sup>
- It is a deep rooted tradition in many Ethiopian communities, perpetuated by poverty, lack of education and economic opportunities, and social customs limiting rights of women and girls.
- The legal age of marriage in Ethiopia is 18 years for both girls and boys.
- Ethiopia's national approach to addressing child marriage is closely linked to its work towards ending other harmful traditional practices that affect women and girls. These include Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C), which is highly prevalent in the Afar (60%) region, and marriage by abduction (a cultural practice used by men to take a girl as a wife by force) which is highest in Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region (SNNPR) at 17.5%.<sup>6</sup>

#### Development of the National Strategy on Harmful Traditional Practices

- The National Strategy and Action Plan on Harmful Traditional Practices (HTP) against Women and Children in Ethiopia emerged from the existing national strategic framework, the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP), a five-year national plan aimed to improve the country's economic growth from 2010-2015. This plan contained specific targets for the reduction of child marriage, abduction and FGM/C as part of broader targets for gender and equity.<sup>7</sup>
- The development of the National Strategy and two year action plan began in 2011 and was officially launched in June 2013 under the leadership of Minister of MoWCYA Zenebu Tadesse W-Tsadiq. The strategy was developed by a multi-sectoral task force put together by the federal Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs (MoWCYA).
- The National Implementation and Monitoring Platform is responsible for coordinating and implementing the strategy and action plan.

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<sup>3</sup> Last updated May 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Percentage of women aged 20-24 who were married or had entered into union before the age of 15 and 18, as cited by UNICEF, The State of the World's Children 2015

<sup>5</sup> Figures on harmful traditional practices from the National Strategy and Action Plan on Harmful Traditional Practices against Women and Children in Ethiopia, 2013, p. 5

<sup>6</sup> Figures on harmful traditional practices from the National Strategy and Action Plan on Harmful Traditional Practices against Women and Children in Ethiopia, 2013, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Part of Pillar 7 of the Growth and Transformation Plan.

- The launch of the National Alliance to End Child Marriage (now known as the National Alliance to End Child Marriage and FGM/C) coincided with the national strategy launch, and was influential in directing the HTP strategy's development.
- At the Girl Summit in London in July 2014, the government committed to further action aimed at eradicating child marriage and FGM/C by 2025:
  1. Incorporate relevant indicators in the National Plan and the National Data Collection Mechanisms, including the 2015 Demographic and Health Survey to measure the situation of FGM/C and Child, Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM) and to establish a clear bench mark;
  2. Enhance the coordination and effectiveness of the National Alliance to End Child Marriage and the National Network to End FGM<sup>8</sup> by engaging different actors with key expertise;
  3. Ensure strong, accountable mechanisms for effective law enforcement; and
  4. Ensure an increase of 10% in financial resources to eliminate FGM/C and CEFM from the existing budget.

### **Strategy overview**

- Ethiopia's national strategy on HTPs has eight objectives, which include:
  1. Social mobilisation through a comprehensive national communication strategy;
  2. Harmonising policy and legal framework and effective law enforcement;
  3. Enhancing the capacity of service provision;
  4. Institutionalising evidence-based planning, supervision, monitoring and evaluation, feedback and best practice assemblage and scale-up mechanisms;
  5. Ensuring strategic partnerships with all actors;
  6. Designing effective national resource mobilisation with accountability mechanisms;
  7. Enhancing participation of all rights holders; and
  8. Establishing a national and regional database to systematically show data around child marriage trends and prevalence to inform interventions.
- The strategy has a two-year action plan to guide its implementation.

### **Next steps**

- The government plans to hold a Girl Summit led by the Deputy Prime Minister in 2015 to discuss how the key strategic areas of the national strategy and commitments made at London's Girl Summit in 2014 can be put into action, and how to bring all sectors together to discuss how to address child marriage in a multi-sectoral way.
- Greater clarity from the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development about what financial resources previously existed and how the 10% increase will be distributed across sectors is expected during the Girl Summit.

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<sup>8</sup> The National Alliance and National Network are currently in a process of merging as one entity.

## Country fact sheet: Egypt

Egypt's National Strategy for Prevention of Early Marriage came about against the backdrop of proposals from conservative forces which may have reduced the age of marriage for girls to as low as nine years. The strategy, which prioritises early marriage as part of the national population and development agenda, aims to reduce the prevalence of early marriage by 50% within a five year time-frame. It is currently in the first stage of implementation.

### Child marriage prevalence and context

- While child marriage has been on the decline in Egypt (from 27% in 1995 to 17% in 2008), it is still a widespread social phenomenon with over 17% of girls being married before they reach 18.<sup>9</sup>
- Child marriage mainly affects girls living in poorer rural areas. It is on the rise in some locations, including Upper Egypt.
- The legal age of marriage in Egypt was increased to 18 following amendment of Egypt's Child Law in 2008, prohibiting the registration of child marriages but not criminalising it.
- After the Egyptian Revolution in 2011, proposals for draft legislation which would reduce the minimum age of marriage for girls from 18 to possibly as low as nine years old surfaced from conservative forces in the new government. Negative reaction ensued from the National Council for Women and others and the proposals weren't taken any further.

### Background to the strategy development

- A national strategy to prevent child marriage was developed in Egypt between November 2013 and June 2014. Linked to the National Population and Development Strategy, and the implementation of the ICPD Program of Action in Egypt, it recognised the need to prioritise child marriage as a health and population issue.
- The strategy emerged partially in response to the conservative forces at work at the time seeking to lower the legal age of marriage for girls.
- The National Population Council (NPC), under the leadership of Dr. Hala Youssef, former Secretary General of the Egyptian National Population Council, now Minister of Population, spearheaded the process and facilitated input from a range of different stakeholders.
- Pathfinder International, with support from the Ford Foundation, provided technical assistance for the development of the strategy.

### Strategy Development Process

- Egypt's strategy development process included the following components:
  1. A literature review on the situation of child marriage and strategies for prevention, and validation of the findings by multi-sectoral experts.
  2. Establishment of a working group to input into the development of the strategy. The working group was made up of over 126 individuals and 64 institutions from across sectors, including government representatives, the private sector, civil society, international

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<sup>9</sup> Percentage of women aged 20-24 who were first married or in union before the age of 18, Demographic Health Survey Egypt, 2008

organisations, UN agencies and religious leaders. This large group was divided into four technical groups focusing on (i) legal challenges, (ii) technical challenges (sub-divided into thematic areas of health, education, economic development), (iii) financial challenges, and (iv) social and cultural (including religious) challenges. The working groups helped to build consensus on what needed to be done.

3. Focus group discussions took place in six districts with high child marriage rates to explore different strategy interventions. Meetings were also held with the general public and religious leaders to get their endorsement of the strategy development process.
4. Finally, the strategy was launched at an inaugural conference in June 2014. A National Coordinating Committee was formed to oversee the implementation of the strategy.

## **Strategy Overview**

- Egypt's strategy aims to reduce early marriage by 50% by the end of the five-year plan, focusing on areas with the highest rates or increasing trends of early marriage.
- The strategy adopted a rights-based approach that worked towards ensuring children's rights are upheld by religions, not just by the Constitution, and a partnership approach bringing together government, civil society and the private sector to work together.
- The strategy has five operational directions:
  1. Empowering girls (including economic empowerment);
  2. Support to girls who were married early to minimise the negative impacts on themselves, their children and families;
  3. Complete and update legislation to ensure existing protection laws are working in favour of girls and women;
  4. Empower, educate and prepare young girls so they can tackle family and societal pressures; and
  5. Work with families and communities to ensure they understand the harmful consequences of child marriage.
- The execution of the national strategy is reliant on a results-based planning process, with outputs, outcomes and success indicators to support its implementation in concrete terms.

## **Next Steps**

- The implementation of the strategy is planned in phases with a strong monitoring and learning framework attached.
- This year the Ministry of Population is pushing ahead with the first phase of the strategy, focusing on how best to coordinate and work in partnership, as well as establishing the finance mechanisms needed for implementation, and building human resource capacity.
- A key challenge in this preparatory phase is coordinating the implementation of different intervention models (adapted to different needs in different areas) across governorates.

## Country fact sheet: Nepal

Over the past 12 months, the government of Nepal with the support of UNICEF and *Girls Not Brides* Nepal, developed a multi-sectoral national strategy to address child marriage. The strategy is currently being finalised and endorsed by the government.<sup>10</sup>

### Child marriage prevalence and context

- 41% of Nepalese women aged 20-24 years were married before they turned 18; 29% of girls 15-19 were married.<sup>11</sup>
- Approximately 10% of women aged 20-24 were married before age 15.<sup>12</sup>
- Child marriage is highly prevalent throughout the Terai region bordering India, as well as in the Far and Mid-Western regions.
- The legal age of marriage for girls and boys is 18 years with parental consent and 20 without. Awareness of the legal age of marriage is low and the practice is rarely viewed as a punishable crime, its acceptability perpetuated by a raft of deeply embedded social norms and values.
- In certain regions and communities the dowry system, trafficking and other harmful social norms and practices are intrinsically connected to the practice.

### Background of the strategy development

- The Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare (MoWCSW) initiated the process to tackle child marriage in early 2014 motivated by continuing high prevalence rates of child marriage in the country and a growing global momentum to end the practice.
- It was linked strongly to the South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC), of which ending child marriage is one of five thematic working areas. In early 2014 SAIEVAC developed a Regional Action Plan to End Child Marriage in South Asia (2015-18) that provided strong motivation for the MoWCSW (the implementing body for the Nepal chapter of SAIEVAC) to link Nepal's work with work at the regional level.
- The strategy development was substantially supported financially and technically by UNICEF and facilitated by *Girls Not Brides* Nepal.

### Strategy development process

- From March 2014 until January 2015 the government led a process to develop a multi-sectoral national strategy to end child marriage which focused on mobilising and coordinating interventions across sectors and actors at all levels. The steps of the process included:
- In April 2014, the launch of the process by the MoWCSW supported by UNICEF, UNFPA, and the *Girls Not Brides* Nepal network in Kathmandu. The meeting brought together stakeholders from across sectors – government representatives (including ten line ministries from district and national level), adolescents, civil society, academia, religious leaders, UN agencies, media and

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<sup>10</sup> Given the recent earthquake in Nepal it is uncertain as to when the strategy will be finalised as the government will now be focused on reconstruction efforts for the country in the near future.

<sup>11</sup> Demographic and Health Survey, Nepal 2011

<sup>12</sup> Percentage of women aged 20-24 who were married or had entered into union before the age of 15, as cited by UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children* 2015

development partners – with the goal of identifying priority intervention areas in the strategy’s development within a multi-sectoral and participatory process.

- Establishment of an inter-ministerial Steering Committee to oversee strategy development and a Technical Working Group to provide expertise.
- Formative research on drivers of child marriage in six districts with high child marriage prevalence rates.
- Consultations at national and district levels to identify the most effective strategies for tackling child marriage. It also prioritised building on interventions that evidence showed to work, and strengthening existing structures and mechanisms, for example strengthening Child Marriage Free Village Development Committees (proven examples of institutional positive deviance preventing child marriage).

Throughout the process the government reiterated the complex nature of child marriage to stakeholders and the need to tackle it from beyond a legal perspective to address the deeply entrenched social norms and traditions that perpetuate the practice. This helped to ensure the strategy’s interventions extended to engaging and considering sometimes overlooked stakeholders like married adolescent girls, and to boys.

### **Strategy overview**

- The Nepali strategy has a comprehensive approach in terms of multi-sectoral engagement and recognition of the complex drivers of child marriage, which are often context-specific.
- The underlying foundation of the strategy is to empower the girl child and increase her value in Nepali society to contribute towards achieving gender equality. It is also directed by Nepal’s pledge made at the Girl Summit in London in July 2014 to strive to end child marriage by 2020.
- A Theory of Change to end child marriage was developed as part of the national strategy that outlines six strategic directions that form the basis of the strategy, including:
  - (a) Empowering girls (including economic empowerment);
  - (b) Providing quality education for girls;
  - (c) Engaging men and boys;
  - (d) Mobilising families and communities;
  - (e) Strengthening and providing services; and
  - (f) Implementing laws and policies.

### **Next steps**

- The strategy is currently being finalised and endorsed by the government, to be followed by a costed National Plan of Action for implementation of its strategic directions. This will also include a rigorous monitoring and evaluation framework to monitor implementation progress.
- The prospects for implementation will be reliant on strengthening the evidence base on scalable child marriage interventions, resource allocation across sectors, and commitment to strengthen governance structures, systems and services so as to reach those girls most at risk of child marriage at the grassroots level.

## Country fact sheet: Zambia

In 2013 the Government of Zambia launched a nation-wide campaign to end child marriage. Spearheaded by the Ministry of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs, the campaign prioritised engagement with traditional leaders and law reform. In 2015 Zambia started to develop a five year national action plan to end child marriage.

### Child marriage prevalence and context

- Zambia has one of the highest child marriage rates in the world, with 42% of women aged 20-24 years married by the age of 18, and 9% married by the age of 15.<sup>13</sup>
- Child marriage prevalence varies widely depending on the region, with the highest prevalence in rural areas, especially the Eastern province (60%).
- The rates may even be higher given that birth registration currently stands at 14%, making it difficult to determine the exact age of millions of girls at the time of marriage.<sup>14</sup>
- The minimum age of marriage is 21 for girls and boys under statutory law. However, there are inconsistencies in the legal system, both between different pieces of legislation, and between statutory law and unwritten customary law, which allows girls to be married at puberty.
- The Constitution and Marriage Act are currently under revision to improve the disparities between the two legal systems, which exist in parallel under Zambia's dual legal system.

### Background to the campaign development

- Statistics showing high rates of child marriage, teenage pregnancy, HIV and high dropout rates of adolescent girls from school due to pregnancy or child marriage motivated the Government of Zambia to take action to tackle child marriage at scale.<sup>15</sup>
- The campaign was led by the Ministry of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs (MoCTA) under the leadership of former Minister Professor Nkanda Luo, who has since moved to the Ministry of Gender. MoCTA took the lead due to the influential and powerful roles that chiefs play in Zambia as community gatekeepers, influencing practices within their chiefdoms and its ability to mobilise traditional leaders in all provinces.
- The campaign also involves ten other line ministries, and was supported by international donors including DFID, the Ford Foundation, the Graça Machel Trust, UNICEF, UNFPA and USAID.

### Campaign development process

- Zambia's campaign has involved the following key milestones:
  - The launch of the three year national campaign in April 2013 by the Zambian First Lady Dr. Christine Kaseba Sata with the message "End child marriage: Let Girls be Girls... Not Brides".
  - A Child Marriage Symposium in July 2014, gathering stakeholders from all ten Zambian provinces, including government representatives, former/current child brides,

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<sup>13</sup> Percentage of women aged 20-24 who were married or had entered into union before the age of 15 and 18, as cited by UNICEF, The State of the World's Children 2015

<sup>14</sup> UNICEF, The State of the World's Children 2015

<sup>15</sup> Rate of teenage pregnancy at 28% and school dropout rate of adolescent girls due to pregnancy or child marriage 46%, as cited in Demographic Health Survey Zambia 2007

traditional leaders, Alangizi (traditional counsellors), traditional healers, academia, civil society organisations, youth, media, UN agencies and development partners. The outcomes were a commitment document to end child marriage signed by ten Cabinet Ministers, and the creation of a national network of NGOs against child marriages, which is now an important civil society partner for the government's campaign.<sup>16</sup>

- Leadership from Zambia on the international stage: including Zambia's lead with Canada on the first UN Resolution on Child, Early and Forced marriage in September 2013, and again in November 2014, as well as Zambia's reaffirmed commitment to tackle child marriage multi-sectorally at the high-level Girl Summit in London in July 2014.
- The revision of the Constitution (yet to be finalised by the National Assembly) and existing Marriage Act.

### **Campaign overview**

- The primary focus of the Zambian campaign was on amending the law and engaging traditional leaders. The key objectives of Zambia's campaign were:
  - To empower traditional leaders to become champions and agents of change in their chiefdoms; and
  - To amend relevant laws and policies to ensure that girls are legally protected from child marriage.
- In 2015 a multi-sectoral theory of change is being developed to form part of a national plan of action.

### **Next steps**

- The government's political commitment to the campaign is strong, however, the campaign's short three year timeframe is soon coming to an end.
- The focus and approach of Zambia's work will soon be guided by a five year national action plan to end child marriage, which is due to be finalised in mid-June 2015.
- A multi-sectoral Technical Committee is currently working to identify priority interventions for discussion at an upcoming stakeholder workshop.

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<sup>16</sup> Chaired by Women and Law in South Africa (WLSA) with its secretariat hosted by Plan International Zambia.