

GIRLS NOT BRIDES
STRATEGY



**Report on strategy
consultations**

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to report on findings from consultations with *Girls Not Brides* members and external stakeholders on the Partnership's 2017-2020 Strategy. It serves as a background paper to the [draft Strategy](#).

As the [current *Girls Not Brides* strategy](#) expires at the end of 2016, the secretariat launched a consultation process to develop a new strategy for 2017-2020 for the Partnership, with the support of consulting firm StrategiSense. The aim of the new strategy is to provide a clear roadmap for our work together over the coming years.

At the heart of this strategy development process have been the members of *Girls Not Brides*, who have the expertise and knowledge of local contexts in which child marriage occurs. The process was designed to encourage the structured and inclusive engagement of all members.

In April, the first phase of the consultation invited *Girls Not Brides* members to celebrate our successes, reflect on how we work together, and suggest what should be our collective priorities. These consultations yielded over 350 rich and diverse responses that have been analysed to identify themes, trends, opportunities and questions for further consideration. An overview of this consultation can be found in Annex I.

The secretariat developed a [discussion paper](#) outlining the key themes that emerged from this first round of consultations. The paper also highlighted important strategic and tactical questions about the direction of *Girls Not Brides* over the next four years. A second round of consultation was conducted in July and August. Over 250 people took part in this consultation, the vast majority from *Girls Not Brides* member organisations but also stakeholders from international organisations, governments, and other global partnerships (see Annex II for more details).

The results of these two rounds of consultations were used to develop a [draft Strategy](#), with goals and outcomes to guide the Partnership's work over the next four years. This report accompanies the draft Strategy, and is intended to explore responses to the discussion paper from the second round of consultations.

During many stakeholder interviews, it was noted that the discussion paper was a useful guide for the field as a whole, and the *Girls Not Brides* strategy helps guide the work of external partners. We hope that this report provides some useful insights for both members and stakeholders.

We want to acknowledge the support and guidance received from the [Member Reference Group](#). This small, diverse group of *Girls Not Brides* members has been advising the secretariat throughout the development of the new strategy, including by providing valuable feedback on the draft discussion paper and draft Strategy, and providing advice on the consultation process itself.

2. Overarching themes

During consultations, four overarching themes emerged that are relevant to all the new proposed strategic goals and outcomes. These themes have been integrated across the goals, and will also help shape the work of the secretariat.

(i) Accountability

Responses to the consultation on the discussion paper revealed a complex vision for the Partnership's role in addressing questions of accountability. Respondents noted that a multi-level (global, regional, national, and community-based) approach to monitoring and reporting on government commitments and the obligations of duty-bearers was needed. They also noted that many actors (including civil society, governments, international institutions, regional organisations, communities and funders) all have a role to play.

International institutions have an important role in relation to the implementation of Target 5.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals, both within international processes and in-country, as well as reporting on governments' implementation of human rights obligations. Regional organisations like the African Union have prompted commitments and launched campaigns. They now need to hold governments accountable to achieving their commitments. At the national and local level, civil society, particularly through collective advocacy, will need to hold national and local duty-bearers to account, both in terms of implementation and funding. Citizens' hearings or other community-based accountability mechanisms were noted as important ways to ensure that national commitments filter down to the local level. Donors can also play a role by including accountability for ending child marriage into their results frameworks and reporting on aid.

Some respondents noted that *Girls Not Brides* members must hold each other accountable to achieving our joint strategic goals and outcomes.

The discussion paper sought input on whether members could take on dual implementation and accountability roles. Of those that responded to that question, more than 75% felt that it was appropriate to play both roles. Some participants cautioned that it depends on national context – for example implementation can occur at community and district level, but accountability should be national – and that it is therefore important to contextualise the response.

(ii) Gender equality

In the first round of consultations some respondents stressed that, while tradition, poverty and lack of opportunity are drivers of child marriage, gender inequality is the underlying cause. The *Girls Not Brides Theory of Change* explicitly puts gender equality at the heart of our vision: *A world without child marriage where girls and women enjoy equal status with boys and men and are able to achieve their full potential in all aspects of their lives.*

During the second round of consultation, the need to address issues of gender was raised throughout the responses to all the questions, from integrating a more gender-transformative focus in programming to ensuring that the role of gender inequality in driving child marriage is addressed within international debates. Many respondents cautioned that the capacity of grassroots organisations in this area needs to be strengthened, and that interventions must be locally sensitive and designed with those affected. However, there was a strong sense that it is important to address issues of gender centrally in the Partnership's work. Only one respondent said that gender was not a good lens to raise in their context,

but several cautioned that explicitly raising sexuality in some contexts could trigger a backlash or hinder progress. Therefore, we need to communicate about the importance of gender inequality, while remaining mindful of different cultural contexts.

(iii) Engaging all relevant actors and sectors

In the first round of consultations, it was widely recognised that a focus on child marriage must be integrated within the work of different development and governmental sectors (e.g., education, justice, health, humanitarian aid), and that holistic responses must be multi-sectoral in nature.

Second-round consultation responses revealed that education was seen as an important sector to engage, as well as health and employment. The need for a multi-sectoral approach was raised repeatedly by respondents, particularly with regards to international and national-level efforts to ending child marriage. At the international and regional levels, intergovernmental institutions, global partnerships, donor governments and global funds in different sectors must recognise that addressing child marriage is integral to achieving their own sector-specific objectives. At the national and sub-national level, engagement from all relevant government ministries and agencies is a critical component of an effective response to child marriage. International NGOs must work to mainstream child marriage throughout their sectoral programming. National partnerships and other national civil society coordinating bodies need to engage a diverse, cross-sectoral membership, and work with coordinating bodies and coalitions from other sectors.

Likewise, no one organisation or entity can address child marriage alone. We all have a role to play, and efforts should involve all actors. We will not succeed without the full engagement of civil society, communities, families, traditional and religious leaders, governments, donors, international organisations, youth and affected girls.

(iv) Youth

The importance of engaging youth and youth-led organisations, particularly at-risk and married girls, was noted by consultation respondents within most of the goal areas. Youth bring unique expertise, experience and commitment to our collective advocacy to end child marriage. Moreover, youth are an important resource in developing programming, and are key actors in local and national efforts to end child marriage. Members mentioned the importance of meaningfully engaging girls and young people in programme design, and representing and elevating the voices of at-risk and married girls in communications and advocacy activities.

Meaningful youth participation, of both girls and boys, was noted as important to the success of members' interventions as well as the global partnership as a whole. Members emphasised the need to ensure that diverse groups of young people, and their organisations, are playing an active, meaningful role in the global partnership. This engagement should also strengthen their abilities as youth activists.

3. Consultation findings per strategy goal

Goal A: Governments

Governments take action to end child marriage and address the needs of married girls in their countries, with the active participation of civil society and other stakeholders.

Despite great progress in prompting commitments to end child marriage, respondents to the first round of consultations noted that there is a continued lack of government accountability for the implementation of these commitments. When asked which goal from the 2014-2016 Strategy would have the most impact on ending child marriage if it could be fully achieved, the goal focused on national-level progress (current Goal C) was most commonly selected.

During the second round of consultation, there was a strong focus on the development and implementation of national strategies as a critical way of ensuring progress. Respondents said the Partnership should: advocate for the adoption and implementation of national strategies; ensure civil society and grassroots participation; support the establishment of cross-sectoral taskforces at the national level with all relevant actors; work together to ensure the implementation of existing policies; analyse and track budgets and allocations; and, advocate for financial allocations from governments and development partners. It was also suggested that the secretariat should draw on experience within the Partnership to identify what best practice, norms, policies, legislation, national frameworks look like. This information can be used as a tool to inform strategies at the national level and to influence key actors at the global level.

Tracking and monitoring government implementation of commitments, such as through scorecards or community accountability mechanisms, was seen as very important. It was noted that government accountability is not just about law enforcement but also about supporting communities and local governance institutions to be more active. Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals at the national level was frequently noted as an important opportunity both to spur action and ensure implementation.

More specific areas of focus for national advocacy included: ensuring that governments adopt and enforce laws on the age of marriage; the translation and implementation of these laws at the local level; community action plans; sensitisation campaigns; and, the incorporation of child marriage into national development strategies and other national initiatives.

There was strong consensus from all respondents – members and external stakeholders alike – that *Girls Not Brides* national partnerships and national-level coordination of NGOs working together on joint advocacy, learning, and programming, will be critical.

During the first round of consultations, a question emerged about whether *Girls Not Brides* should focus on countries with the highest rates of child marriage, or on a few countries showing the most potential for change. Further interrogation of this question in the second round did not produce any conclusive results. Many respondents felt that progress must be spread beyond the current “tipping point” countries to include as many countries with high rates of child marriage as possible. The need to address this gap in response was also reinforced by the latest data from UNICEF on prevalence and burden, which shows that the countries with the highest absolute number of girls married each year include a much broader group than we have traditionally focused on (including Brazil, Indonesia, Iran, Mexico, Philippines and Thailand) (see the Annex III for the data).

Different roles the Partnership could play in specific types of countries emerged in consultation responses:

- In countries with strong state structure or stability, and political will, it was suggested that the Partnership could focus on supporting the development of national strategies, and coordinating civil society through national partnerships to hold governments accountable.
- For fragile or crisis-affected states, some respondents urged the Partnership to play a dual role of expanding the number of grassroots members in those areas and supporting their work at the community level, while advocating for UN agencies, international NGOs, and other humanitarian actors to include a focus on child marriage in their programming.
- In countries with low political will or interest, some suggested that global attention to the Sustainable Development Goals and media attention could help increase political will, and that grassroots organisations could push for change in the face of government inaction.
- A number of respondents also cited the need to continue to demonstrate that progress is possible in a few promising states, i.e., ‘showcase models.’

Many respondents noted the need to address the gaps in attention and progress in countries with high rates of child marriage in Latin America and the Middle East and North Africa.

Goal B: Global

The global community champions and supports efforts to end child marriage.

In the first round of consultations, 58% of survey respondents indicated that our goal to influence international fora (Goal A of the current strategy) was achieved, or significant progress has been made, while 42% indicated some or little progress has been made or that more work needs to be done.

During the second round, we asked at which level (international, regional, national or community) will our collective action having the greatest impact over the next four years. While ‘work at the international level’ was cited the fewest times as the area likely to have the *greatest* impact, ‘working at all levels’ was noted as the most important by more respondents (24%) than any other level, except ‘community-level’ (30%).

Many noted that community-level progress is critical, but takes a long time. It also requires a top-down and bottom-up approach where the perspectives, needs and priorities of community-based organisations should inform the advocacy objectives at all other levels, and the progress at other levels enables grassroots change. Some respondents felt that the secretariat and members of the Partnership working at the global level need to be better at translating global opportunities into actions that can be taken by grassroots organisations, and conversely ensuring that their voices are reflected within global processes.

As mentioned above, respondents saw an important role for international and regional organisations, and other international actors, in ensuring government accountability to commitments, particularly within the Sustainable Development Goals. Respondents also cited gaps in the international and regional response thus far, noting the need to engage additional international institutions and other prominent international organisations (such as other global partnerships, UN agencies, etc.), for example, those focused on education, humanitarian response, economic empowerment, health and others.

The possibility for regional institutions to help spur new progress was also mentioned in consultations, particularly in Latin America.

Respondents also emphasised the role of the international community in maintaining momentum on the issue of child marriage. Many respondents, including about one-third of Francophone respondents, highlighted the importance of using global and regional advocacy ‘moments’ – such as commemorative days – for joint action. The elements most cited as important to maintaining momentum were strong communications (which includes the voices of global champions, case studies, success stories) and the importance of an evolving, nuanced, and gender-forward narrative that maintains the perception that the problem persists, but can be solved.

Goal C: Community action

Efforts to engage communities, families and girls are supported and highlighted.

In the first round of consultations, 79% of survey respondents said that they work with families and communities to change social norms. The same percentage said that entrenched social norms are one of the top three barriers to ending child marriage.

During the second round of consultations, 68% of respondents to the feedback form said that they work at the community level. Respondents were asked to identify at which level (international, regional, national or community) our collective action could have the greatest impact over the next four years. A plurality of respondents (30%) specifically mentioned work at the community level.

In the second round of consultations, there was overwhelming feedback that social norms change must be initiated from communities themselves, but that there are specific things that the global partnership can do to support community-based work. These include sharing and amplifying best practice and case studies, raising community voices at the national and global levels, and building the capacity of grassroots organisations.

The need for increased grassroots capacity was strongly highlighted throughout the consultations. Key capacity gaps that were noted include fundraising, programme design, advocacy, media engagement, financial management, gender-transformative programming, and use of data and evidence, among others.

Goal D: Funding

More sustainable funding for effective approaches is available from a diverse range of sources, particularly for grassroots organisations.

During the first round of consultations, 83% of survey respondents reported that little to no progress, or only some progress, had been made toward the goal of increasing funding in the field (Goal D of the current strategy). The lack of funding for grassroots organisations, and the absence of long-term funding for work to change social norms, were specifically noted.

In the second round, we asked about the best opportunities to mobilise new funding, and how to collectively ensure that funding reaches community-based organisations. There was strongest support

from respondents for specific efforts to get funds to the grassroots than for any other tactic mentioned. National-level resourcing, increasing new donor interest in child marriage and mainstreaming child marriage into other sectors, were also mentioned frequently.

In terms of the opportunities to work together, survey respondents saw opportunities in engaging the global donor community, creating joint proposals among members and, somewhat surprisingly, the creation of a monitoring and accountability mechanism for members. Some members pushed for the secretariat to provide funds directly to national partnerships or grassroots members, and an equal number saw opportunities in having international NGO members of the Partnership fund grassroots organisations.

Goal E: Learning

Efforts to end child marriage are informed by evidence and lessons learned.

During the first round, 30% of survey respondents indicated that increased research and evidence to support their work was one of the top three forms of support their organisation desired from the *Girls Not Brides* Partnership. Members expressed a continued desire to learn from each other about what is working and what is not, particularly at the national level.

In the second round, we asked what specific additional knowledge or evidence was needed. While the need for more knowledge and evidence was reiterated, there was no consensus or significant trends among member responses about which specific areas need to be filled. Even though there were over 200 respondents to the feedback form, most issues were mentioned only once, and only three areas were mentioned more than twice.

In terms of how the secretariat can support learning and knowledge-building, there was strong support for in-person meetings, and documenting and exchanging best practices. Some participants also supported an intranet or web platform, and exchange visits between member projects.

External stakeholder interviews revealed a significant disagreement on whether there is enough evidence on child marriage, and what is meant by having evidence: Is this related to the drivers and consequences? Typologies? Documentation and case studies of approaches? Or strictly evaluated programmes? Some felt that there is plenty of data and evidence of what does and doesn't work, particularly in relation to other sectors; others felt that decision-makers do not have the right information on evidence-based programming available to them. Several external stakeholders mentioned that the key role for the Partnership is in synthesis, packaging the most important parts of the full spectrum of evidence, and getting it to decision-makers and others who will use it. Several mentioned the need to bridge global evidence with local information.

Goal F: Partnership

The Partnership continues to collaborate, diversify and strengthen.

Throughout both rounds of consultations, the diversity and size of the *Girls Not Brides* membership was noted as a key strength of the Partnership. The wealth of knowledge, the variety of perspectives and contexts, and the range of skills and competencies were all described as being assets that the Partnership has been able to leverage.

Members found high value and increased impact in the opportunity to collaborate nationally, regionally and globally with organisations doing similar work, and in the sharing of resources and best practices. Many members, as well as some external stakeholders, indicated that this networking would not exist without *Girls Not Brides'* facilitation and infrastructure. The larger network, including national partnerships, have resulted in major accomplishments such as the inclusion of child marriage in the Sustainable Development Goals.

Some respondents mentioned the value of having a common global agenda to end child marriage. Despite differences in contexts, resources and approaches, the global agenda builds bridges across organisations, nations and advocacy platforms.

While the membership of *Girls Not Brides* has grown enough that a few external stakeholders raised concerns about managing a large membership, many respondents also noted that key gaps in the membership persist. These include Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East and North Africa, and East/South East Asia and the Pacific, particularly in countries with particularly high numbers of child marriage (see Annex III). Gaps were also noted in sectoral approaches and among some constituencies, such as youth-led organisations.

Finally, a few members and external stakeholders discussed the issue of ensuring a governance and accountability model for the Partnership that both reflects the voices of, and represents the needs of, members and young people including affected girls.

Annex I: Overview of consultation round one

This Annex provides an overview of the consultation that was undertaken between March and May 2016, most intensely during April.

(i) Consultations methods

Survey

An online survey was made available to all *Girls Not Brides* member organisations, with the option of completing the survey online or in writing offline. Over 275 responses were received from over 60 countries, including a diverse range of *Girls Not Brides* members:

- Respondents ranged from small grassroots organisations to international NGOs, operating in a total of 165 countries.
- There was significant representation from South Asia, as well as from West Africa, East Africa and Southern Africa.
- Most survey respondents indicated that they work at the local or national level, while less than 20% of respondents work at the international level.
- Most respondents (58%) have 20 or fewer full-time staff and volunteers.
- Sixty-seven percent of respondents indicated that their organisation participates in a national partnership.

Virtual focus groups

45 representatives from *Girls Not Brides* member organisations took part in virtual focus groups.

In-country focus groups

The *Girls Not Brides* secretariat held in-country focus groups with members during trips planned during the consultation period. Focus groups were held with members in Kenya, Malawi, Nepal and Uganda, and consultations were convened in Senegal, South Africa and at the Women Deliver conference.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted with 14 key external stakeholders, including donor government representatives, private funders, UN agencies and researchers. Three national partnership coordinators were also interviewed.

Survey for donors

A short online survey was sent to current funders of *Girls Not Brides*.

(ii) Review of best practice and key literature

StrategiSense, the strategy consultants supporting the *Girls Not Brides* secretariat with the first and second phases of the consultation, conducted a review of best practice of global partnerships and a high-level review of relevant literature.

Annex II: Overview of consultation round two

This Annex provides an overview of the consultation that was undertaken on the discussion paper in July and August 2016.

Feedback form

Throughout July, we invited feedback on the discussion paper from *Girls Not Brides* members and other stakeholders via an online form.

- Over 200 individuals from over 55 countries responded to the feedback form.
- Of these respondents, over 150 were *Girls Not Brides* members.
- Over 50% of respondents were based in Sub-Saharan Africa, and over 20% were based in South Asia.
- One-third of respondents were young people.
- Sixty-five percent of respondents said that they work at the national level, and 68% said that they work at the community level.
- Respondents that were not members included government representatives, coalitions, individual advocates, researchers, representatives from international organisations, and civil society organisations who are not members of *Girls Not Brides*.

Virtual focus groups

We invited *Girls Not Brides* members to take part in virtual focus group discussions. There were 23 participants across six virtual focus groups.

In-country focus groups

Colleagues from the Africa team at the *Girls Not Brides* secretariat held in-country focus groups with members in the countries in which they are based: Dakar, Senegal and Nairobi, Kenya. There were 25 participants across both sessions.

Stakeholder interviews

The secretariat had one-on-one conversations with 12 key stakeholders ranging from private foundations, representatives from governments with high rates of child marriage, the UN, global partnerships, and international NGOs. One stakeholder submitted written feedback.

Annex III: Latest data about highest prevalence and burden of child marriage¹

Married by 18, by prevalence (percentage of girls)		
Rank	Country	Prevalence (%)
1	Niger	76
2	Chad	68
3	Central African Republic	68
4	Mali	55
5	Bangladesh	52
6	Guinea	52
7	Burkina Faso	52
8	South Sudan	52
9	Mozambique	48
10	India	47
11	Malawi	46
12	Somalia	45
13	Nigeria	43
14	Madagascar	41
15	Ethiopia	41
16	Eritrea	41
17	Nicaragua	41
18	Uganda	40
19	Sierra Leone	39
20	Cameroon	38

Married by 18, by burden (number of girls)			
Rank	Country	Married by 18	
		Prevalence (%)	Burden (000)
1	India	47	26,610
2	Bangladesh	52	3,931
3	Nigeria	43	3,306
4	Brazil	36	2,928
5	Ethiopia	41	1,974
6	Pakistan	21	1,875
7	Indonesia	14	1,408
8	Mexico	23	1,282
9	Democratic Republic of the Congo	37	1,274
10	United Republic of Tanzania	37	887
11	Uganda	40	711
12	Philippines	15	708
13	Egypt	17	681
14	Mozambique	48	611
15	Niger	76	609
16	Sudan	33	605
17	Iran (Islamic Republic of)	17	583
18	Nepal	37	523
19	Thailand	22	503
20	Kenya	23	482

¹ UNICEF global databases 2016, based on Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), and other national surveys.