



A Three-Step Guide to developing a collective Theory of Change

(i) What is the Three-Step Guide and who is it for?

This short guidance note will provide you with clear steps for how to develop a simple, accessible Theory of Change for the work that you do collectively with your National Partnership, or the national group/network/alliance you work with. This guide can be used with or without the online [webinar](#) and [presentation](#) that were developed to accompany it. However, the online webinar will give you an overview of the *Girls Not Brides Theory of Change* and includes some discussion of tricky questions about the process that you may find helpful.

We know there are multiple methods for developing a Theory of Change – however, this approach has been developed with the specific needs of *Girls Not Brides* National Partnerships, as well as other networks, alliances and groups working to end child marriage, in mind. We know from our members that *Girls Not Brides* National Partnerships often face time constraints, and are made up of a very wide range of civil society organisations – with a variety of skills and capabilities. For example, some members may never have developed a Theory of Change, whereas others will have more experience in this area. This Three-Step Guide has therefore been designed to be:

- Useful and accessible to different audiences with diverse capabilities
- Simple and clear to understand
- An intuitive tool which allows you to really focus on the context in which you work
- A light-touch, low-intensity process that can be carried out in a relatively short space of time
- Used with the *Girls Not Brides Theory of Change* as a helpful reference point

(ii) Why should we develop a Theory of Change?

A Theory of Change for your National Partnership will outline how the work you do as a group will lead to substantive progress in efforts to end child marriage at the national level. It will map out the strategies you will use to achieve an effective response to child marriage in your country, and will highlight why you think change will happen in this way.

Developing a Theory of Change will also bring additional benefits:

- It builds a **shared understanding** of desired change you hope to achieve as a group, and *how* you will achieve it
- The process **helps to identify hidden assumptions/different views** that members of the group have and enables you to discuss these in order to reach consensus

What is a Theory of Change?

Rick Davies, an influential Monitoring and Evaluation expert, defines it as:

‘The description of a sequence of events that is expected to lead to a desired outcome’¹

Others view it as:

‘An ongoing process of reflection to explore change and how it happens’²

¹ Rick Davies, April 2012: Blog post on the criteria for assessing the evaluability of a theory of change <http://mandenews.blogspot.co.uk/2012/04/criteria-for-assessing-evaluability-of.html>

² James, C. (2011) “Theory of Change Review. A report commissioned by Comic Relief”, Comic Relief: <http://mande.co.uk/2012/uncategorized/comic-relief-theory-of-change-review/>



- Supports **partnership working** – it can help members of a national group to clarify roles and responsibilities and understand the specific ways they are contributing to the work of the wider group
- If you want a **digestible and visual way to externally communicate** the work that you do as a group, a summary diagram of your Theory of Change can be extremely persuasive.

(iii) Where do we start and who do we involve?

The *process* of developing a Theory of Change can be a valuable way to understand more about the work different organisations are doing within your National Partnership as well as giving you valuable learning time to think about how you work together. Here are some key considerations before you start the process:

- 1) **Make sure that the Chair/Co-ordinator of your National Partnership is on board and supportive of the process.** Their buy-in and support will be essential in driving the process forward.
- 2) **Be participatory and involve as many of your members as possible.** The more people who meaningfully contribute, the stronger their commitment to the final product.
- 3) **Ask a strong facilitator to lead the session.** For a large group, this is essential to make the process manageable and to stay on track. You may want to request support from the *Girls Not Brides* secretariat or identify an external facilitator.
- 4) **Consider how long you will need to develop your Theory of Change.** Some National Partnerships may be able to do this in a workshop setting over the course of a few hours, depending upon the complexity of the interventions you are discussing. Alternatively, you can break down the process into more digestible stages and integrate time to complete each step into your upcoming National Partnership meetings.
- 5) **Allocate roles and responsibilities.** Before the process begins, decide who is responsible for note-taking and documenting the process and consider mobilising a core group of 3-4 member organisations that are responsible for organising the sessions and taking the process forward.
- 6) **Finally, make sure you have the *Girls Not Brides* [Theory of Change](#) to hand so that you are able to use it as a reference point.** This is a resource created by our members for our members so please do use it as and when you feel it will complement the process.

(iv) What materials do we need?

- ✓ A venue large enough to seat participating members of your National Partnership
- ✓ Flip charts and paper
- ✓ Sticky notes
- ✓ Marker pens
- ✓ Copies of the Three-Step Guide
- ✓ Copies of the *Girls Not Brides* Theory of Change to End Child Marriage
- ✓ Copies of your situation analysis and/or strategic plan/advocacy plan



Creating the right environment for developing your Theory of Change

- Be as **participatory** as possible. A wide range of perspectives will add value to the process.
- Go into it with an **open mind**. Be willing to be challenged along the way.
- Encourage participants to be open and create a **safe context** where they can speak frankly. It is essential that your National Partnership Chair/Co-ordinator is on board to help you do this.
- Get a **strong facilitator** to help keep the process focused and on track.

(v) The Three-Step process

Step 1

Step 1 in this process is all about gaining a shared understanding of why child marriage is practised in the area where you work and who or what needs to change in order for it to be prevented.

Firstly take a moment to consider the following question:

Has your National Partnership already carried out a problem/situation analysis to inform its work?

Yes? If so, now is the time to revisit it and discuss the key findings with all your members.

No? If not, the following generalised questions provide a good starting point for discussion:

- What is the problem you are trying to address? Child marriage! In addition, just like the *Girls Not Brides* Theory of Change, you may want to think about working towards a more ambitious vision which works towards gender equality between girls and boys, women and men in your country.
- What are the key factors influencing the problem? Think about the specific, localised drivers in the communities where you work which mean this practice is perpetuated.
- Who or what needs to change and why? Consider the different individuals who influence the decisions made in a girl's life. What about other factors in the community and a girl's life which if changed could have a positive impact on child marriage rates?

Once you have discussed the questions above or revisited your situation analysis, consider the next question:

How strong is the gender analysis in your situation analysis?



As a group think about the following questions:

- What is the underlying factor *driving* the problem of child marriage in your country? Remember root causes can vary considerably across a country and the perspectives of different members will come in useful here. It is important to keep asking ‘why’ to really gain an understanding of the root cause. For example, if poverty is a driving factor in your community, think about ‘why’ when poverty levels are high, the practice affects more girls as opposed to boys?
- Which *particular* groups of girls are being affected? Who is most vulnerable? Think about what age girls tend to be when married? Are they in school or out of school? Do they belong to minority or marginalised groups in the community?
- What is the level of knowledge around the issue of child marriage in the community? Are there particular attitudes and traditional practices/ beliefs which are common in the local community which influence or are linked to child marriage?
- What are the norms relating to age and gender contributing to the problem?
 - What are the gender roles ascribed to women and girls?
 - What levels of participation in decision-making do women and girls enjoy e.g. within the household, at the community level, in formal decision-making at a regional or national level? This will affect their ability to resist an unwanted marriage or to take action in response to child marriage.
 - What are the norms relating to children – how does the community feel about child participation? And the participation of girls in particular?
- What are the consequences for married girls? E.g. high rates of gender-based violence, early child bearing, lack of access to schooling, intergenerational poverty, trauma?
- What other factors contribute to the problem? E.g. quality of services for girls at risk and survivors? Are women and girls involved in the planning, delivery and decision-making of these services?
- What is the legal and policy environment? Has the government ratified international human rights instruments? Is there minimum age of marriage legislation and is it enforced at the local level?

There are a range of useful reports and resources which can help you as you work through Step 1:

- **Girls Not Brides website:** this provides a wealth of information on the causes and consequences of child marriage, <http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/where-does-it-happen/>
- **Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) for your country:** these surveys provide reliable statistics on a range of social, health and education outcomes. See the DHS website for links to your country’s latest report, <http://www.dhsprogram.com/>
- **UNICEF’s Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS):** these provide a huge database of statistics including child marriage prevalence rates per country, <http://mics.unicef.org/>
- **Gender equality indexes within UNDP’s Human Development Reports:** provides annual information on a range of development outcomes useful in understanding national-level trends, <http://hdr.undp.org/en>

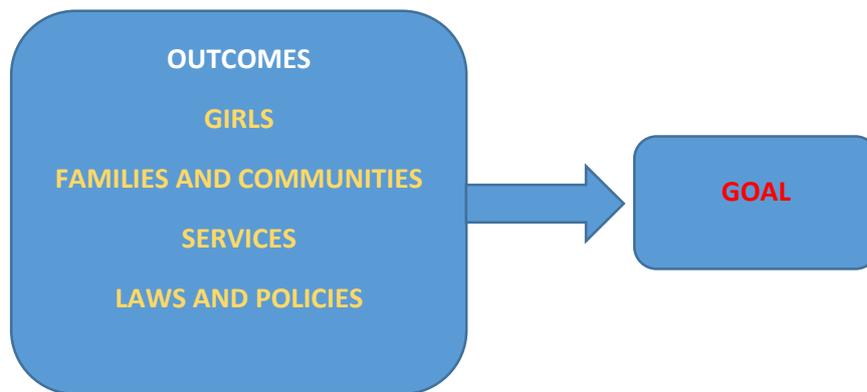


- **Research carried out by members of your group:** never underestimate the amount of local knowledge in the room!

Step 2

Step 2 asks you to consider the following question:

What is the ultimate goal your National Partnership is working towards?



Then discuss,

What are the four or five long-term changes we want to achieve as a direct result of our collective work in the National Partnership?

It is very important to make sure that these outcomes are directly linked to and addressing some of the key areas identified in your problem/situation analysis – in particular the key drivers of child marriage that you have identified.

If you are identifying outcomes as a group, then you may find that you have a long list of potential outcome areas to work on. Prioritisation will be necessary. To help you prioritise consider the following:

- *Which areas can we have the most impact upon based on our available skills?*
- *Which areas does the group have appetite, energy and passion to work on?*
- *Are we focusing our efforts on tackling the gender inequalities that are driving the practice?*

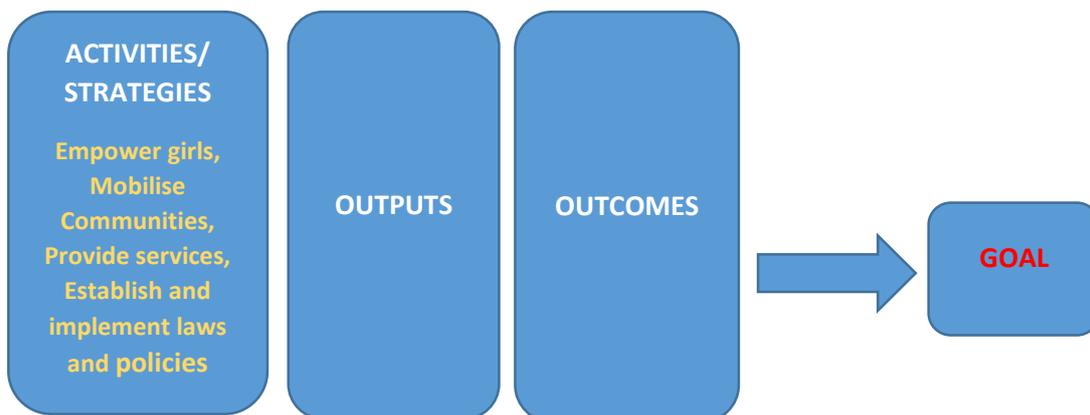


TOP TIPS

- At this stage, you might want to take a moment and refer back to the *Girls Not Brides Theory of Change*. Consider whether it makes sense to group your outcomes according to the outcome areas in the *Girls Not Brides Theory of Change*, as this can provide a very useful framework for thinking about outcome development. These include: **EMPOWER GIRLS, MOBILISE FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES, PROVIDE SERVICES, ESTABLISH AND IMPLEMENT LAWS AND POLICIES** (remember these categories include both at-risk girls and married girls).
- This process can also help you to identify gaps in your membership base within the National Partnership – there may be important driving factors or issues that are exacerbating the problem, and you may have an important outcome area that you would like to work on, but through a group discussion, you realise you do not have members equipped with expertise to address these. You may consider increasing your membership base to respond to this need, or perhaps as a group you might like to think about how the *Girls Not Brides* secretariat could support you to fill these skills gaps.

Step 3

The purpose of Step 3 is to identify which strategies and activities are needed to bring about change. You will need to consider which activities will help you to achieve your outcomes and your goal.



The diagram above builds upon the outcomes and the goal you identified earlier and is starting to look like a 'logic model'. Most *Girls Not Brides* National Partnerships will have worked with some version of a logic model, which are typically created during programme development to help think through and show the 'logic' of how the programme activities will produce impact. There are many different ways to display a logic model, and many different terms for each of the elements, steps or stages. The example above is a simple one that we will be using to finalise our Theory of Change.



What's the difference between a logic model and Theory of Change?

The logic model or log frame highlights how the activities you do collectively as a National Partnership lead to the outputs and outcomes that you need to achieve to reach your ultimate goal.

A Theory of Change is in some ways very distinct from a logic model. There is no standardised format for a Theory of Change and it has no limits in the number of steps in a change process. Although most logic models encourage you to explore assumptions, Theories of Change tend to include more of an emphasis upon assumptions and understanding the causality behind how change happens.

Refer to the *Girls Not Brides Theory of Change*: Are some of the strategies in the *Girls Not Brides Theory of Change* helpful pointers here for thinking about specific activities you may want to carry out? These strategies are: Empower Girls, Mobilise communities, Provide services, Establish and Implement Laws and Policies. Listen to the webinar for programming ideas for each of these areas. There may be other strategies that are relevant to your context too.

TOP TIPS

- Develop strategies/activities that you as a group can collectively contribute to and that you have the skills to carry out.
- Ranking tools and voting exercises can help you to prioritise strategies.

It's now essential that you think through some of the assumptions³ underpinning the activities or the strategies you will use to achieve your outcomes and goal.

Consider and discuss in a group:

How do we know this activity/strategy will lead to the changes identified in the logic model? What assumptions are we basing this on?

It is also important to ask yourself:

What if these assumptions don't hold true? Is our original activity/strategy still valid?

³ Assumptions refer to 'the things we are taking for granted and are assuming will be/are true'.



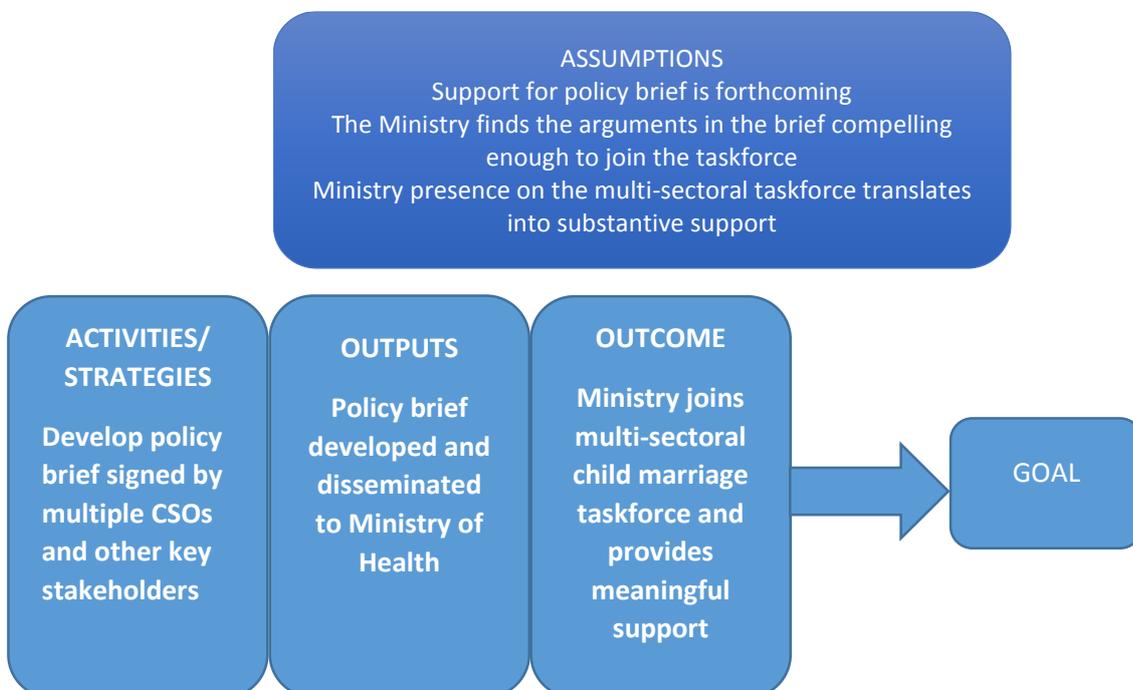
Let's take a *fictional* example to better understand how to identify your assumptions.

The problem statement: the Ministry of Health in Uganda is unsupportive of the national child marriage response and is not participating in an important multi-sectoral taskforce that was set up to develop a child marriage strategy and action plan.

Your goal: In this case, your goal might be to see increased support (both technical and financial) from the Ministry of Health.

Activities and outputs decided on: One of the activities you decide you could carry out to achieve this goal is to develop a policy brief demonstrating how and why child marriage is a health issue and how failure to address it can impact upon progress towards the Ministry's health targets. You want to demonstrate you have a critical mass of support by ensuring this policy brief is signed by multiple civil society organisations and influential stakeholders.

According to this sequence of events: IF the Uganda National Alliance develops a policy brief THEN it can be shared with the Ministry of Health. IF the Ministry reads the brief that is signed by lots of stakeholders, THEN they will be persuaded to join the child marriage taskforce. IF they join the Taskforce, THEN this will mean they start to contribute meaningful support and assistance for the national child marriage response. Some of your assumptions are then highlighted in the diagram below:





You can now develop assumptions for all the main activities/strategies planned for your group. At the end of this process, you'll have the first draft of your Theory of Change! You can present this as creatively as you wish. There are examples for you to view in the [webinar](#) and [presentation](#) accompanying this guide.

TOP TIPS

- During this stage you may find that different group members have different ideas about how change comes about. Use this as an opportunity to discuss and reach consensus.
- For those of you who have already developed your strategy, it is worth going back to it, and identifying some of the assumptions underpinning your chosen activities and reflecting upon how you know they will lead to the desired changes you've identified.

(vi) Suggestions for further reading and resources to support this process

- For more information on the **Theory of Change including the User Guide and interactive version** visit our dedicated [Theory of Change page](#) on the *Girls Not Brides* website.
- Visit the section on [Measuring Progress](#) to download our **Recommended Indicators and User Guide resources**.
- For more **tools, guidance notes and practical materials** to help you strengthen your work to end child marriage, please visit the *Girls Not Brides* [resource centre](#).
- For **reports and publications** on the issue of child marriage visit our [reports page](#) on the *Girls Not Brides* website.
- For more information contact Kate.Whittington@GirlsNotBrides.org or Lara.VanKouterik@GirlsNotBrides.org