



GIRLS NOT BRIDES | The Global Partnership
to End Child Marriage

LESSONS LEARNED FROM NATIONAL INITIATIVES TO END CHILD MARRIAGE – 2016

CONTENTS

1. Introduction	4
2. Terminology	5
3. Methodology	6
4. Overview of national initiatives	7
5. Lessons learned in 2015	7
6. Lessons learned in 2016	8
Lesson 1: Sustained government leadership and political will are essential to ensure national initiatives keep moving forward	9
Lesson 2: Governments need to strengthen their capacity to coordinate work across sectors, and to allocate budget to address child marriage	11
Lesson 3: Civil society has a vital role to play in the design and implementation of national initiatives and holding governments accountable to their commitments	13
Lesson 4: Dedicated national initiatives help with agenda-setting and coherence but care should be taken to ensure child marriage is not then seen as a "standalone" issue rather than the multi-sectoral issue it is	14
7. Recommendations	16
8. Conclusion	17
Annex: Further information about national initiatives (by country)	18

1 INTRODUCTION

In 2015 *Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage* commissioned “Lessons Learned from Selected National Initiatives to End Child Marriage”.¹ The report reflected on national initiatives to end child marriage in four countries: Egypt, Ethiopia, Nepal and Zambia. It considered why national initiatives were emerging, how they were being developed, what they included, and their prospects for implementation. The purpose was to draw lessons learned from national initiatives for use by *Girls Not Brides* members and other interested stakeholders.

The lessons that emerged as a result of this research led to the development of “A check-list for national strategies to end child marriage”.² The checklist was developed to support *Girls Not Brides* members, civil society networks, government ministries, UN agencies, development partners, research organisations and other interested stakeholders as they started working on planning the development, implementation and monitoring of dedicated national strategies to end child marriage.

In September 2015, 193 governments adopted target 5.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals to end child marriage by 2030. Since then, an ever increasing number of countries have begun to develop national initiatives to end child marriage, predominantly

in Africa and South Asia. Understanding different national initiatives and what impact they are having will be critical to making progress. As such, from August - November 2016 the *Girls Not Brides* secretariat undertook a second analysis to learn more about the experiences in countries with existing and newly developed national initiatives. This report considers national initiatives in 11 countries: Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mozambique, Nepal, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. While it is still too early to fully understand the impact of these initiatives, there are some commonalities and lessons emerging across countries.

We hope that the lessons and practical examples captured in this report will be useful to those who are working to develop, strengthen and - most importantly - implement national initiatives to end child marriage, and that these will help to pave the way for future discussions.

We start by briefly outlining key terminology used (Section 2), followed by the research methodology used for the report (Section 3), and an overview of the national initiatives analysed (Section 4). We give a brief summary of lessons learned in 2015 (Section 5) and discuss the common lessons and challenges that are emerging across national initiatives in 2016 (Section 6). The report closes with recommendations going forward (Section 7) and conclusions (Section 8).

We would like to thank all of those people who were interviewed and contributed their insights for this report.

¹The report is available from <http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Lessons-learned-from-national-strategies-Girls-Not-Brides-July-2015.pdf>

²The check-list was developed by the *Girls Not Brides* secretariat with input from *Girls Not Brides* members and national partnerships, as well as UNICEF and UNFPA, and is available from <http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/resource-centre/check-list-national-strategies/>

2 TERMINOLOGY

Below are a number of commonly used terms in relation to national initiatives to address child marriage³:

COMMONLY USED TERM/S	DEFINITION
National strategy or national strategic framework	Usually a high-level document that outlines a vision for ending child marriage and strategic direction for action in a specific time frame. It is owned and approved by the government as a whole rather than just one Ministry.
National action plan, plan of action, implementation plan, road map or operationalisation plan	Usually a more detailed document outlining the specific actions required to fulfil the overall strategic goals of a national strategy. It may be part of a national strategy (sometimes as an annex) or developed as a standalone document following the launch of a national strategy. Implementation plans tend to set out the structures, coordinating mechanisms, process and roles in executing a national strategy, in keeping with the guiding principles of the overall strategy. Some implementation plans are costed with indicative budgets for interventions, and accompanied by a detailed monitoring & evaluation framework.
National campaign	Usually characterised as a public communications and awareness raising exercise to highlight the impact, drivers and solutions to ending child marriage. For example, the regional campaign on child marriage led by the African Union has led to the initiation of national campaigns in a number of countries. These are sometimes, but not always, linked to a government's national strategy on child marriage.
Theory of change	A Theory of Change usually describes how and why a programme is expected to work. In the context of a national strategy, a Theory of Change may outline the strategies that are needed to develop an effective response to child marriage in that country. ⁴

³Throughout the report, we have used the terminology 'address child marriage,' which includes both the prevention of child marriage as well as the mitigation of the effects of child marriage (i.e. through the provision of support to girls who are already married or have been married).

⁴In a number of countries, *Girls Not Brides* Theory of Change on child marriage has helped to inform what a comprehensive response to child marriage involves: <http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage-theory-of-change/>

3 METHODOLOGY

As of November 2016, over 20 governments have taken steps towards developing national strategies or action plans to address child marriage.⁵ In addition, at least 17 governments have launched the African Union's campaign to end child marriage.⁶ A number of others have taken steps to integrate child marriage into related national strategies.

This report focuses on national initiatives in 11 countries: Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mozambique, Nepal, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The countries chosen were those with publicly available national-level strategies, action plans or roadmaps to end child marriage in the country.

The report does not address the impact of national awareness campaigns on child marriage or how child marriage has been integrated into related sectoral strategies; these are important to consider but go beyond the scope of this report.

The research for this report was done between August – November 2016 and is based on:

- A desk review of national initiatives, strategy documents and related research from Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mozambique, Nepal, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.
- Interviews with 13 key informants from Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Uganda, and Zambia, including *Girls Not Brides* members, civil society representatives, UNICEF and UNFPA staff, donor government representatives and other development partners.

- Analysis and documentation of lessons learned and challenges identified across country experiences by the *Girls Not Brides* secretariat.
- A discussion on emerging lessons learned and recommendations at a meeting of *Girls Not Brides* National Partnership representatives in November 2016.

This report is not intended as an evaluation of specific national initiatives. Nor does it aim to compare national initiatives that address child marriage, but rather analyse them collectively so as to draw common lessons to inform global learning about their potential for effectiveness.

Limitations of the research

All analysis is based on qualitative information available to the *Girls Not Brides* secretariat through desk research and key informant interviews as of November 2016. In some countries, only a limited number of informants were identified and available to participate in the research and in some countries none at all. In countries where key informants were not specifically interviewed for this piece of research, information was gathered and analysed from both official documents and conversations the *Girls Not Brides* secretariat had with key stakeholders through in-country visits or regular calls.

Case studies are used throughout the report to give concrete examples of approaches used in different countries rather than examples of best practice. In many cases it is still too early to tell what impact they have had.

⁶Of these countries, 17 have hosted national launches of the African Union's campaign to end child marriage, a regional campaign which aims to speed up change across Africa by encouraging governments to develop initiatives to raise awareness of and address the harmful impact of child marriage: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Ghana, Madagascar, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sudan, The Gambia, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

4 OVERVIEW OF NATIONAL INITIATIVES

The following countries have national initiatives that have been officially endorsed by government:

- **Burkina Faso's** National Strategy on the Prevention and Elimination of Child Marriage (2016-2025) (in French: "Stratégie nationale de prévention et d'élimination du mariage d'enfants") and Triennial Action Plan of the National Strategy (2016-2018) (in French: "Plan d'actions opérationnel triennal de la stratégie nationale de prévention et d'élimination du mariage d'enfants au Burkina Faso").
- **Chad's** roadmap to end child marriage and female genital mutilation (2016-2018) (in French: "Feuille de route de lutte contre le mariage des enfants et les mutilations génitales féminines").
- **Egypt's** National Strategy to Prevent Child Marriage.
- **Ethiopia's** National Strategy and Action Plan on Harmful Traditional Practices against Women and Children in Ethiopia. The two-year action plan 2014-2015 has expired and is currently under revision.
- **Mozambique's** National Strategy for the Prevention and Elimination of Child Marriage (2015-2019) (in Portuguese: "Estratégia Nacional de Prevenção e Eliminação dos Casamentos Prematuros em Moçambique").

- **Nepal's** National Strategy to End Child Marriage (2015-2030).
- **Uganda's** National Strategy on Ending Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy (2014/2015 - 2019/2020).
- **Zambia's** National Strategy on Ending Child Marriage (2016-2021).

Analysis of the following national initiatives and action plans was also taken into account in this report, though it is important to note that they were still in draft form at the time of the research, and are therefore subject to change:

- **Bangladesh's** draft National Action Plan to Eliminate Child Marriage (2015-2021)⁷.
- **Ghana's** draft National Strategic Framework for Ending Child Marriage (2017-2026).
- **Zimbabwe's** draft National Action Plan and Communication Strategy on Ending Child Marriage.

More information about each country's national initiative can be found in the Annex.

5 LESSONS LEARNED IN 2015

In the research conducted on national initiatives in July 2015, some of the key lessons learned about the development process and content of national initiatives included:

Lesson 1	The success of a national initiative 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.
Lesson 2	Inclusive and participatory strategy development processes help foster longer term impact, include vital perspectives and capture the complexity of interventions needed to tackle child marriage, and contribute to building a sustainable national movement to end child marriage.

⁷ Progress on adopting of the draft National Action Plan for Bangladesh has stalled in the face of domestic and international outcry about recent regressive legal proposals which would allow child marriage under the age of 18 in 'special circumstances'.

Lesson 3	Integrated, multi-sectoral responses are needed to end child marriage, and strategies for engaging different sectors should be tailored to that sector's interests and priorities.
Lesson 4	Coordination, collaboration and communication can help to build alignment between diverse stakeholders about what needs to be done to end child marriage, and maximise collective impact.
Lesson 5	The content of national strategies should always be informed by evidence and research to ensure strategies are responsive to sub-national variations and the specific needs of girls at risk of child marriage, and married girls.

The insights from the 2015 report informed the development of “A check-list for national strategies to end child marriage”, a tool which has been used in a number of countries both to inform and reflect on the country's national initiative.⁸ It outlines questions to consider when developing a national strategy, in relation to:

- The process for developing a national strategy (political will, consultation process, evidence base).
- The content of what is included in a national strategy (the vision, goal and key principles, realistic targets and prioritisation of interventions, synergies with related policies).
- The implementation of a national strategy (roles, responsibilities and accountability, costing and budgeting, capacity building, coordination, monitoring and evaluation).

6 LESSONS LEARNED IN 2016

The lessons learned from national initiatives in 2016 build on those drawn in 2015. The 2015 report focused predominantly on strategy development processes, as we wanted to understand why national initiatives were emerging and what the motivations were for their development. This report has a sharper focus on the question of how to move towards implementing a national initiative across sectors.

There is now widespread recognition that national initiatives can be a very useful tool in laying out a coordinated picture of the roles of different ministries and other stakeholders in a comprehensive national response to child marriage. However, a national initiative only adds value if there has been sufficient planning and involvement of relevant stakeholders, and if there are the necessary resources, commitment and capacity to allow for implementation.

⁸The check-list is available from <http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/resource-centre/check-list-national-strategies/>

In 2016 the four key lessons that emerged from the research on national initiatives are:

Lesson 1	Sustained government leadership and political will are essential to ensure national initiatives keep moving forward.
Lesson 2	Governments need to strengthen their capacity to coordinate work across sectors; to communicate clearly about what is happening and to allocate budget to address child marriage.
Lesson 3	Civil society has a vital role to play in the design and implementation of national initiatives and holding governments accountable to their commitments.
Lesson 4	Dedicated national initiatives help with agenda-setting and coherence but care should be taken to ensure child marriage is not then seen as a “standalone” issue rather than the multi-sectoral issue it is.

Lesson 1: Sustained government leadership and political will are essential to ensure national initiatives keep moving forward

In 2015 a key lesson learned was that the success of a national initiative ultimately hinges on the leadership and commitment of a government. Without strong political will, any efforts to tackle child marriage across line ministries will not and cannot reach scale and result in transformative, lasting change for girls. Our analysis in 2016 took a deeper look at the different levels of political will required for implementing a national initiative, e.g. governments could.

- Lead an inclusive and participatory process to ensure the acceptance and ownership of the national initiative by all stakeholders.
- Ensure that all relevant line ministries actively participate in the process to ensure a multi-sectoral approach to child marriage.
- Coordinate its approach across ministries and with other stakeholders.
- Develop clear lines of accountability for implementation.

- Allocate adequate resources (both technical and financial) across ministries.
- Ensure dedicated, committed and trained staff across ministries.
- Prioritise and implement strategies to address child marriage.

From what we heard in our interviews in 2016, there are still many technical and financial capacity constraints faced by governments and challenges in sustaining political attention to child marriage.

1.1 The role of gender and women's ministries

In the 11 countries analysed, the “lead ministry” for each country’s national initiative – i.e. the ministry which holds the mandate for coordinating action to address child marriage in the country - was the Ministry of Women, Children, Social Welfare or the equivalent. They tend to have large mandates but little capacity, resources and/or political influence to be able to effect change for women and girls. For most interviewees, this weak capacity and influence of gender ministries is an accepted and normalised constraint which they find ways to circumvent.

It means that the political will to develop a whole-of-government approach to address child marriage is important. Interviewees mentioned that central government (for example, the Head of Government or the Cabinet) can play a critical role in demonstrating public commitment to ending child marriage. This then gives the lead ministry the mandate and political clout to be able to influence other ministries to take action on child marriage in their own sectoral plans and policies.

Gender ministries also play an important role in providing technical support and coordinating leadership on efforts to end child marriage. They can use their convening power in a number of ways that do not require much funding, such as:

- Hosting stakeholder consultations on child marriage within the ministry.
- Chairing inter-ministerial working groups and steering committees on child marriage.
- Planning for the dissemination and implementation of a national strategy or action plan at sub-national levels.
- Facilitating meetings and relationships between national and district government staff with non-government stakeholders working on child marriage.
- Organising and/or facilitating meetings with other ministries like education or health, to highlight the importance of addressing child marriage in their respective work. They can also stress the need to plan, budget and monitor interventions in line with the overall national initiative on child marriage.

Some interviewees mentioned that moving a coordination mechanism (that is usually chaired by the lead ministry) to the prime ministerial / cabinet level could be effective for putting child marriage firmly on the agenda of the highest political authority

in the country. This could signal the government's commitment to addressing child marriage and the importance of the mandate of the lead ministry to other ministries.

1.2 Political stalemates

In the 2015 report, an ongoing challenge identified was that child marriage is an “of the moment” topic in international development. Many governments have publicly supported the issue in international and regional fora without taking sustainable action in their countries. In the past year, target 5.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals has provided some impetus for action. However, interviewees mentioned numerous instances where progress on national initiatives has stalled – sometimes with little to no progress for well over a year or longer.

In some contexts external or environmental bottlenecks were identified as reasons for the delayed implementation of a national initiative. Barriers to progress have included natural disasters, elections and consequent changes in government, political insecurity and terrorist attacks. While these are important external environmental threats which those working to tackle child marriage must face, some interviewees expressed concern that beyond an initial state of emergency, such events may also be used as an excuse for prolonged government inaction. Slow judicial processes, constitutional amendments and political stalemates on child marriage legislation within cabinets were also cited as reasons for stalling progress.

In such sensitive and complex contexts, it can be difficult for NGOs to know if and how they should push for action and accountability from government. Some interviewees who faced stalled progress on child marriage at national levels instead focused their efforts on working with local government to address child marriage at the district and community levels.

Lesson 2: Governments need to strengthen their capacity to coordinate work across sectors, to communicate clearly about what is happening, and to allocate budget to address child marriage

Coordination across sectors was raised repeatedly as a challenge in the implementation of national initiatives. There is general consensus that better coordination, collaboration and communication are needed to build alignment between diverse stakeholders about what needs to be done to end child marriage. However, there is still a large gap in terms of *how* to best coordinate among multiple actors and sectors effectively.

Some aspects of coordination across sectors raised by interviewees include:

2.1 The need for a functioning coordination mechanism led by the government to implement the national initiative

These coordination mechanisms are identified by many names – steering committees, advisory councils and coordinating units, among others. From the countries analysed, most coordination

mechanisms seem to be chaired by the gender or women's ministry. Some coordination mechanisms have several functioning parts: an inter-ministerial advisory body to take large decisions on the direction of a national initiative, as well as a government-chaired technical working group or task force to focus on the content and technical aspects of a national initiative. These task forces are often composed of local and international civil society, UN agencies, donors, traditional and religious leaders, youth representatives and other development partners who provide technical inputs and expertise in relevant areas. A functioning coordinating body was highlighted as particularly pertinent for implementation across ministries and departments, at national, sub-national and community levels.

From a funding perspective, a functioning coordination mechanism is useful for donors, so that they know where best to allocate funds to support civil society efforts and strengthen government systems to implement the national initiative. This is particularly important in countries where there have been multiple new programmes to address child marriage in recent years, which has resulted in duplication and fragmentation of efforts in some areas.

“We need to know who’s doing what, where, and how, with what resources, so we aren’t all implementing separately on child marriage.”

- An interviewee

BURKINA FASO'S MULTI-SECTORAL PLATFORM FOR IMPLEMENTING THE NATIONAL STRATEGY

Burkina Faso's National Strategy of Prevention and Elimination of Child Marriage 2016-2025 and Triennial Action Plan 2016-2018 were finalised in November 2015. A multi-sectoral committee was launched in June 2016 to coordinate the implementation of the strategy at the national level, with responsibilities shared across

13 ministries, technical and financial partners, and civil society organisations. Chaired by the Ministry of Social Action and National Solidarity, the Ministry of Education as vice-chair and the Ministry of Gender as the secretariat also play key roles in the platform.

2.2 The importance of good communication and ways of sharing information with multiple actors

To ensure effective coordination, clear and transparent communication on the progress of a national initiative's development and implementation is needed. Some interviewees mentioned that an information sharing mechanism – perhaps an extension or component of a government-led coordination mechanism – would be useful for keeping everyone updated on national efforts to end child marriage. This would help inform research development, funding allocations, policy and legislative developments related to child marriage and programmatic interventions.

Using social media to communicate and share updates on efforts to tackle child marriage in Ghana

In Ghana, one of the ways in which the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection communicates with the many diverse stakeholders involved in efforts to address child marriage is through an official Facebook page “Ghana Ends Child Marriage”. With almost 20,000 people having “liked” or “following” the page, government, UN agencies and civil society have reported it to be a useful way for sharing updates, new research, videos and information on child marriage in Ghana in a timely way.

2.3 Communication on national-level developments to sub-national and community levels

Success of a national initiative and its implementation depends on its successful application and adaptation to local contexts. Ensuring that people working at district and community levels are aware of the initiative and know how they can contribute is important. Across the 11 countries there were a few examples where national initiatives had been shared by the government or through the UNICEF-UNFPA Global Programme to Accelerate Change to End Child Marriage⁹ being undertaken in partnership with the government in targeted districts.

Sharing the national strategy at the district level in Uganda

In Uganda, the government shared the National Strategy to End Child Marriage (2014/2015 – 2019/2020) through a number of regional and district meetings in northern, eastern and western Uganda with government officials and technical staff. The aim of these meetings was to raise awareness of the national strategy, to provide space for dialogue, and to build consensus and support for the strategy at district levels. During meetings regional and district officials were asked to identify, based on the national strategy, what approaches they wanted to prioritise in their respective areas. As a result, some districts have now started allocating their own resources, within the parameters outlined in the national strategy, to address child marriage locally.

⁹Uganda is one of the focus countries of the flagship UNICEF-UNFPA Global Programme for Accelerating Action to End Child Marriage. Launched in March 2016, the programme aims to support more than 2.5 million adolescent girls at risk of and affected by child marriage over a period of four years and focuses efforts in 12 countries across four regions with high child marriage prevalence.

2.4 Accurately costing and ensuring sufficient budget allocation for the implementation of national initiatives

Budgeting for national initiatives is an ongoing challenge both in terms of accurately costing the initiative, as well as ensuring adequate budget allocation for its implementation. While some national initiatives have indicative figures allocated in implementation plans, no government has as yet demonstrated how they will find and allocate sufficient funds for a comprehensive response to child marriage.

Costing the National Plan of Action in Zambia

In Zambia, when developing the five-year National Plan of Action (based on the National Strategy on Ending Child Marriage 2016-2021), the government conducted a session with accountants from key ministries to assist in costing it. Their expertise in accounting, inflation rates, and knowledge of government systems was a useful exercise in ensuring the right technical people were brought into the process of costing the annual activities of the action plan.

Interviewees mentioned some of the ongoing technical challenges of costing and budgeting national initiatives, including knowing how to:

- Involve the Ministry of Finance to ensure budget for implementing the directions of the national initiative across sectors is included in government plans for expenditure each financial year.
- Make sure the lead ministry works with other line ministries to guarantee their resources are mobilised for child marriage in planning processes and work plans.
- Accurately cost a national initiative beyond vague indicative estimations and to be able to say (a) what interventions count as preventive to child marriage, and (b) what interventions count as responsive to child marriage and supportive of married girls.
- Mobilise funds to ensure they go where they are most needed – to communities and local levels of government – and to ensure local level officials, communities and girls (especially married girls) are aware of local funding pots.

Unless this enormous challenge of finding and allocating the necessary funding is addressed, the development of a national initiative will have been a largely futile exercise, as it will be impossible to implement.

Lesson 3: Civil society has a vital role to play in the design and implementation of national initiatives and holding governments accountable to their commitments

A point that emerged strongly from interviews is the increasing role of civil society in holding governments to account for implementing national initiatives as well as their international and regional commitments to address child marriage. This call for increased accountability seems to have grown in part from commitments made by governments to the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, including target 5.3 to end child marriage by 2030; regional commitments like the African Common Position on Ending Child Marriage and the South Asian Regional Plan of Action to End Child Marriage, and those made by governments at the London Girls' Summit in 2014, among others.

In some countries, *Girls Not Brides* National Partnerships and other civil society networks have been instrumental in catalysing government action on child marriage through their collective advocacy. They are also vital partners in the development and implementation of national strategies and action plans. On a practical level, lead ministries find such civil society coalitions easier to interact with, as well as a more efficient use of government time. For example, it is easier for a government officer to speak with one civil society member representing a collective group of organisations who have agreed goals and policy asks on child marriage, instead of speaking to dozens of different civil society organisations hoping to work with the Ministry with dozens of different policy asks and messages.

In other contexts, it was mentioned that civil society networks have weak capacity, organisational development, technical knowledge and/or resources to conduct collective advocacy, or to organise or mobilise themselves with a united front to government. UNICEF, UNFPA and international NGO staff sometimes expressed their wish to work more with *Girls Not Brides* National Partnerships or civil society networks focused on child marriage, but were unable to do so due to these capacity and/or organisational constraints.

The important role of national civil society in providing local-level expertise and more nuanced understanding of child marriage, particularly at sub-national levels, was mentioned by interviewees from UN agencies and international NGOs. Their expertise can help ensure efforts target the hardest-to-reach and most marginalised girls. Civil society organisations are also critical partners of local government in the sharing and adaptation of national initiatives to local contexts.

Lesson 4: Dedicated national initiatives help with agenda-setting and coherence but care should be taken to ensure child marriage is not then seen as a “standalone” issue rather than the multi-sectoral issue it is

The major added value of dedicated national initiatives to address child marriage is their potential to help set the agenda for a holistic and comprehensive response to child marriage in a country and bring coherence to the many different efforts addressing it.¹⁰ They can serve as a “roadmap” for addressing child marriage across sectors.¹¹ Interviewees hoped that such a roadmap would also help stakeholders outside the government better understand where to concentrate their efforts to address child marriage, how to work better with others, and how to complement government efforts.

However, a risk of creating dedicated initiatives on child marriage is to see child marriage as an isolated issue. It is important to keep in mind the multi-faceted nature of child marriage and the multi-actor nature of the response. Action is needed across sectors to empower girls and work with communities to address child marriage, to strengthen health, education, child protection and legal systems and services for girls, and to implement laws and policies to address child marriage. Not all programmatic interventions which emulate from a strategy need to be specifically or exclusively designed with ending child marriage as their sole goal. What is important is for each line ministry or department to integrate a focus on child marriage in the design, implementation and monitoring of their work so they can maximise their impact in addressing child marriage.

¹⁰ If national initiatives already exist on other cross-cutting issues affecting adolescent girls – such as on empowerment or tackling violence against women and girls – there may not be a need for a full standalone national strategy on child marriage.

¹¹ More information on how best to address child marriage across sectors in programming efforts can be found in the 2016 briefing series by ICRW and *Girls Not Brides* “Taking action to address child marriage: The role of different sectors” available from: <http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/resource-centre/child-marriage-brief-role-of-sectors/>

Some examples of action by other ministries suggested by interviewees include:

- Working with the Ministry of Health to provide quality and adolescent-friendly sexual and reproductive health programming, information and services to girls, including those at risk of child marriage and those already married.
- Working with the Ministry of Education to ensure girls at risk of child marriage and married girls are targeted in education efforts, to ensure they have access to, and stay in, quality education.
- Working with child protection systems and services to strengthen response mechanisms to gender-based violence and violence against children, especially girls.

- Working with the Ministry of Youth and/or Sports to encourage the meaningful participation of adolescent girls in sports, youth programmes or similar.

Interviewees also mentioned the importance of connecting national initiatives targeting child marriage with related issues that affect adolescent girls, such as teenage pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, female genital mutilation and cutting (FGM/C) and other harmful traditional practices. Government recognition of these links is evident in the focus of several countries' national initiatives: Chad's roadmap to end child marriage and female genital mutilation (2016-2018), Ethiopia's National Strategy and Action Plan on Harmful Traditional Practices against Women and Children, and Uganda's National Strategy on Ending Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy (2014/2015 - 2019/2020).

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

This section includes recommendations which emerged after discussions with key informants and representatives of *Girls Not Brides* National Partnerships. The recommendations relate principally to the roles of different actors – central government, lead ministries, civil society, UN agencies, donors and other development partners – in implementing national initiatives to address child marriage.

Central government can:

- Demonstrate commitment to the issue at the highest political level by providing strong leadership and prioritising addressing child marriage in the political agenda.
- Support the lead ministry that holds the mandate to address child marriage and implement the national initiative, both technically and financially.
- Instruct line ministries to implement a multi-sectoral response by mobilising their respective resources (both technical and financial), e.g. by ensuring that a percentage of the budgets of related line ministries are allocated to address child marriage.

Lead ministries can:

- Create and maintain a functioning mechanism to coordinate development and implementation of the national initiative across ministries and with relevant stakeholders.
- Ensure there is a way to share information about the government's work widely and in a timely manner to all stakeholders.
- Lead strategic planning to ensure a multi-sectoral, inclusive and participatory approach to child marriage.
- Mobilise and facilitate the meaningful participation of all stakeholders in national initiative processes and consultations at all levels.
- Support the identification of priority interventions.

We still have much to learn on how best to implement national initiatives in a coordinated and effective way that makes sense for each sector. Therefore we will continue to build upon and strengthen these recommendations, as more learning in this area unfolds.

Civil society can:

- Support the implementation of parts of the plan and ensure that their efforts are aligned as part of a coordinated national approach to addressing child marriage.
- Collectively advocate to ensure that civil society perspectives are reflected in planning and implementation of national initiatives and hold governments accountable to their commitments.
- Provide technical advice to governments in programme design and implementation.
- Build the case for change in the country and support the national initiative by raising public awareness of the issue.
- Amplify the voices of girls and communities to ensure a nuanced understanding of child marriage at community levels informs the design of policies and programmes implemented as part of the national initiative.
- Ensure young people are included meaningfully in all parts of the process.
- Assist sub-national and local government with the sharing and adaptation of national initiatives for their implementation in local contexts.
- Assist governments and UN agencies with documenting national level processes and learning on child marriage that can be shared with others working to address child marriage - nationally, regionally and internationally.

UN agencies, donors and other development partners can:

- Provide technical resources to support lead ministries (through costing the initiative, supporting effective coordination mechanisms, and identifying priority interventions to make progress in the short, medium and long term, etc.).
- Provide technical and financial resources to support civil society to hold government accountable to their commitments.
- Ensure a strong evidence base informs the national initiative.
- Ensure that child marriage is addressed in, and provide support to, sectoral efforts to improve the lives of adolescent girls at risk or already married. For example, girls' access to, and retention in, quality education and sexual and reproductive health and rights programmes.
- Assist governments in documenting national level processes and learning on child marriage that can be shared with others working to address child marriage - nationally, regionally and internationally.

8 CONCLUSION

An increasing number of countries with high prevalence rates of child marriage have begun to develop national initiatives to address it. This presents an unprecedented opportunity to coordinate efforts of stakeholders across sectors to maximise impact for girls. This report has considered the diverse experiences of 11 countries which have developed national initiatives – Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mozambique, Nepal, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe – in order to capture common lessons learned from national initiatives which can be shared with other countries considering similar responses.

We have learned a lot about why and how these have been developed, and what a comprehensive response involves. However, we still have much to learn about how to ensure that these national strategies and action plans are implemented across sectors – how to cost and budget for implementation; how to plan, coordinate, implement and monitor efforts across different sectors; how to prioritise interventions which will maximise impact; and how to measure progress in the medium to long term. We hope this report will pave the way for further discussions and learning on the implementation of national initiatives to end child marriage, in order to achieve real and lasting change in the lives of girls.

Annex: Further information about national initiatives (by country)

(a) Bangladesh's draft National Action Plan to Eliminate Child Marriage (2015-2021)

At the London Girl Summit in July 2014, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina committed to taking steps to end child marriage by creating a National Plan of Action by the end of the year. The Plan would end marriage of under 15 year olds and reduce by one third marriages of girls between 15-18 years by 2021. The Government also committed to end all child marriages by 2041. Shortly after the Summit, and under the leadership of the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs, work began on developing the National Action Plan to Eliminate Child Marriage 2015-2021. However, progress quickly began to stall in the face of a domestic and international outcry about legal proposals that would mark a step backward for Bangladesh. In September 2014, the Cabinet of Bangladesh approved language in the draft Child Marriage Restraint Act 2014 which would lower the minimum age of marriage from 18 to 16 years for girls. The resulting outcry left the draft Act in limbo along with the National Action Plan which hadn't been finalised or implemented. In 2016, the Government again looked at the Act (now called the Child Marriage Restraint Act 2016) and in November 2016 the Cabinet approved the inclusion of a special provision in it which would allow child marriage in "special circumstances". In addition, the Act did not specify a minimum age for marriage. With fears that such a provision would legitimise statutory rape and encourage the practice of child marriage there was again a national and international outcry. At the time of going to print the draft Act is due to be debated in parliament sometime in early 2017. Bangladesh is a focus country of the UNICEF-UNFPA Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage.

(b) Burkina Faso's National Strategy of Prevention and Elimination of Child Marriage (2016-2025) (in French: "Stratégie nationale de prévention et d'élimination du mariage d'enfants") and Triennial Action Plan of the National Strategy (2016-2018) (in French: "Plan d'actions opérationnel triennal de la stratégie nationale de prévention et d'élimination du mariage d'enfants au Burkina Faso")

On 3 March 2015, the African Union's Campaign to End Child Marriage was launched in Dori, in the Sahel region, where prevalence rates are the highest in Burkina Faso. The National Strategy of Prevention and Elimination of Child Marriage 2016-2025 and the Triennial Action Plan of the National Strategy 2016-2018 were finalised in November 2015. Both are linked to an overall government vision of "Burkina 2025", which includes ending child marriage by 2025. The national strategy outlines four strategic objectives: (i) Prevent all forms of child marriage; (ii) Support victims of child marriage; (iii) Strengthen national efforts to end the practice; and (iv) Coordinate, monitor and evaluate the implementation of the strategy. The Triennial Action Plan 2016-2018 outlines the operationalisation of the national strategy in concrete terms over those three years. A multi-sectoral platform was launched in June 2016 to act as the coordination and piloting body of the strategy at a national level. Within the platform there are roles and responsibilities outlined for all actors including 13 line ministries. The platform will also be responsible for monitoring strategy implementation and progress. The strategy has been costed for three years to the tune of 6,338,156,000 Francs CFA (approximately US\$10,839,848). Burkina Faso is a focus country of the UNICEF-UNFPA Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage.

(c) Chad's roadmap to end child marriage and female genital mutilation (2016-2018) (in French: *Feuille de route de lutte contre le mariage des enfants et les mutilations génitales féminines*)

The national campaign “All together, let's put an end to marriage of children” was launched on 14 March 2015 under the leadership of President Idriss Deby Itno and First Lady Hinda Deby with support from UN representatives and the African Union's campaign to end child marriage. On that same day the President passed an Ordinance (006/PR/2015) prohibiting the marriage of children under 18, making child marriage a punishable offence, and the bill for this was adopted by Parliament in June 2015. In June 2016 the Ministry of Women, Social Action and National Solidarity, the United Nations and the Organisation of African First Ladies Against AIDS launched a three-year roadmap to end child marriage and female genital mutilation (2016-2018).

The road map includes four strategic objectives: (i) Coordination, monitoring and evaluation; (ii) Social mobilisation and advocacy; (iii) Capacity-building; and (iv) Multi-sectoral response. Before its launch in 2016, the Ministry of Women, Social Action and National Solidarity created a thematic working group responsible for the implementation of the action plan, the mobilisation of resources, and the monitoring and evaluation. The working group is composed of line ministries, civil society, the police and the judiciary, human rights and gender-based organisations, religious authorities, as well as UN agencies (UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, WHO, HRC and OHCHR). As a next step, the Government will focus on increasing efforts to mobilise financial resources in order to implement the plan.

(d) 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 geographic areas with the highest rates or increasing trends of child marriage. It includes a results-based implementation plan. However, progress on implementing the national strategy slowed when the Ministry of Population was disbanded in 2016 (merged with the Ministry of Health). Political insecurity and resulting restrictions on civil society may also have impacted the strategy implementation, though further clarity on its current status is needed from those working on the ground in Egypt.

(e) Ethiopia's National Strategy and Action Plan on Harmful Traditional Practices against Women and Children in Ethiopia (the two year 2014 – 2015 timeline of the action plan has expired and is now being revised by the Government)

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 FGM/C). The country's national strategy – whose timeline has now expired and is currently under revision – 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 it 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 in June 2015 held a follow-up Ethiopian Girl Summit to discuss implementation of the strategy and commitments made. With the expiration of the action plan, the current strategy is being revised. While the content of a new strategy plan is not yet known, a revised strategy may potentially include a clearer focus on child marriage and FGM/C (rather than incorporating all types of harmful traditional practices) which would help direct overall efforts. Ethiopia is a focus country of the UNICEF-UNFPA Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage.

(f) Ghana's draft National Strategic Framework for Ending Child Marriage (2017-2026)

In 2014 the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection spearheaded the development of the Child Marriage Unit to coordinate government efforts on child marriage. In February 2016, the Government of Ghana launched the African Union campaign to end child marriage at the national level. Since then, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, through the Child Marriage Unit, has developed a National Strategic Framework using a participatory process. The strategic framework includes a monitoring and evaluation framework; an operational plan for 2017-2018 and a costing framework. The strategic framework is currently being finalised and the Government hopes to launch it at the beginning of 2017. Ghana has been considerably active in leading child marriage work in the region with plans to take the lead in engaging the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on child marriage. Ghana is a focus country of the UNICEF-UNFPA Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage.

(g) Mozambique's National Strategy for the Prevention and Elimination of Child Marriage (2015-2019) (in Portuguese: Estratégia Nacional de Prevenção e Eliminação dos Casamentos Prematuros em Moçambique)

In 2011 the Government of Mozambique, in partnership with civil society and UNICEF, launched a national campaign for Zero Tolerance to Violence and Child Abuse. The aim of the campaign was to raise awareness of issues affecting children, including child marriage. The Government also sought to tackle child marriage through its Action Plan for Children (PNAC II) in which Target 10 defined actions for addressing child marriage. Following the high-level Girl Summit in London in July 2014, the Government launched a national campaign to prevent and combat early marriage at the provincial level. Later that year, a concluding decision of the Women and Gender Conference was that a specific strategy to address child marriage should be created.

In 2014, the Coligação para a Eliminação e Prevenção dos Casamentos Prematuros (CECAP), also known as *Girls Not Brides Mozambique* or the National Coalition to Eliminate and Prevent Child Marriage, was formed. CECAP worked closely with the Government, UNICEF and UNFPA among other actors on a number of research and policy initiatives that informed the national strategy development process and in December 2015, the National Strategy for the Prevention and Combatting of Early Marriage (2016-2019) was approved by the Council of Ministers (the cabinet). It was officially launched in April 2016 with political support high among government and stakeholders. The strategy outlines eight strategic pillars: six are thematic pillars and two are cross-cutting pillars for coordination and for research & monitoring. The restructured Ministry of Social Action, Children and Gender is responsible for implementing and coordinating the strategy and the various coordination structures are in the process of being aligned with the restructured Ministry. Addressing child marriage is being raised to function at the prime ministerial level, which means a coordination mechanism will be put in place to oversee operationalisation of the national strategy. Mozambique is a focus country of the UNICEF-UNFPA Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage.

(h) Nepal's National Strategy to End Child Marriage

The Government of Nepal, under the leadership of the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare, began its strategy development process in March 2014. 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. At the London Girl Summit in 2014, the Government of Nepal committed to strive to end child marriage by 2020. However, progress during 2015 was slow as a result of the earthquake in Nepal in that year and the subsequent fuel crisis, both of which delayed the national strategy and the development of a national implementation plan. The national strategy has six strategic directions and the Government is now in the process of developing a costed national action plan to implement it. The action plan is due to be finalised by February 2017. Nepal is a focus country of the UNICEF-UNFPA Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage.

(i) Uganda's National Strategy on Ending Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy (2014/2015 - 2019/2020)

On the Day of the African Child 2015, the Government of Uganda launched the African Union campaign to end child marriage along with a five-year National Strategy on Ending Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy 2014/2015 - 2019/2020. Led by the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, the strategy contains a multi-sectoral monitoring and evaluation framework, as well as an indicative budget for the implementation of the strategy of UG SHS 898 million (approximately US\$248,701) for the period 2015-2020. The Ministry is the overall coordinator for implementing the strategy. The strategy states that a “coordination unit under the directorate of gender will spearhead the implementation and monitoring” of the strategy, and that the coordination unit will be headed by a “senior officer with wide experience on child rights and protection”. A robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system is currently being developed by a technical M&E Working Group. This system will be underpinned by a Theory of Change to help ensure that implementation of the strategy is rigorous and effective. Sub-national dissemination and consensus building for the strategy has taken place in eastern northern and western Uganda among local level government officials and officers. Uganda is a focus country of the UNICEF-UNFPA Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage.

(j) Zambia's National Strategy on Ending Child Marriage (2016-2021)

In April 2013, the Government of Zambia initiated a three-year national campaign to end child marriage. The campaign was initially spearheaded by the Ministry of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs but in 2016 the leadership moved to the Ministry of Gender. The campaign involved 10 other line ministries, and was supported by international donors including DFID, the Ford Foundation, the Graça Machel Trust, UNICEF, UNFPA and USAID. When it started the campaign's key objectives 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 campaign has now broadened and the Government built on the campaign to develop a National Strategy on Ending Child Marriage (2016-2021), which was launched in March 2016. A five-year costed national plan of action is now in development to guide the implementation of the national strategy. Zambia is a focus country of the UNICEF-UNFPA Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage.

(k) Zimbabwe's draft National Action Plan and Communication Strategy on Ending Child Marriage

In 2013, Zimbabwe adopted a new Constitution which stipulates that “no person may be compelled to enter marriage against their will” and calls on the state to ensure that “no children are pledged into marriage.” In 2014, two former child brides, Loveness Mudzuru and Ruvimbo Tsopodzi, filed an application asking the Constitutional Court to declare the Marriage Act, which allowed girls as young as 16 to be married with their parents' consent, and the Customary Marriage Act unconstitutional and make the minimum legal age of marriage as 18. In January 2016, the Constitutional Court ruled in favour of Loveness and Ruvimbo and made marriage under the age of 18 illegal. In July 2015, Zimbabwe launched the African Union campaign to end child marriage. A National Action Plan and a Communication Strategy are now in the process of being developed.



LESSONS LEARNED FROM NATIONAL INITIATIVES TO END CHILD MARRIAGE – 2016

Girls Not Brides is global partnership made up of civil society organisations committed to ending child marriage and enabling girls to fulfil their full potential

Published in January 2017 by
Girls Not Brides

Unit 25.4, CODA Studios
189 Munster Rd
London
SW6 6AW
United Kingdom

www.GirlsNotBrides.org
info@GirlsNotBrides.org
[GirlsNotBrides](https://www.facebook.com/GirlsNotBrides/)
www.facebook.com/GirlsNotBrides/

020-3725-5858
0207-603-7811

Girls Not Brides is a company limited by guarantee (Reg. No. 8570751) and a registered charity in England and Wales (Reg. No. 1154230)