



Girls Not Brides Strategy 2014 – 2016

Background

Girls Not Brides was created to help bring an end to child marriage, so that girls can have the opportunity to thrive and become full and equal members of society. The overall strategic objectives of the global civil society Partnership, as agreed upon by the members in 2011, are:

- Increased awareness of the harmful impact of child marriage at the local, national and international levels;
- Expanded policy, financial and other support to end child marriage and to support married girls; and
- Strengthened learning and coordination among organisations working to end child marriage.

While these aims are broad, they provide all *Girls Not Brides* members – whether acting individually or as groups – with a sense of how their work fits into the overall movement. However, with the increased global momentum on child marriage, members have been keen to identify more specific objectives for the Partnership to help focus our efforts and to maximise our impact.

This three-year strategy was developed following a series of consultations with members of *Girls Not Brides* from around the world, as well as with other key partners and stakeholders.

Who is this strategy for?

The achievement of the objectives outlined below will require action at all levels – local, national, regional and international. We know that the lives of girls will only improve if there is a change in their local context, but we also believe that this change can be accelerated if it is supported by a strong global movement.

The members of *Girls Not Brides* form the lifeblood of the Partnership. Members range from small grassroots groups working at the community level to large international NGOs. They approach the issue from a range of perspectives, including human rights, health, education and child protection. Many members work tirelessly in their communities to bring an end to child marriage, sometimes at great personal risk. Members inform the strategies, tactics and messaging of the Partnership, and provide *Girls Not Brides* with the legitimacy to speak out on child marriage in global, regional and national fora.

All members, national partnerships, working groups and other structures of *Girls Not Brides* have a role to play in achieving the objectives outlined in this strategy, and should reflect on the specific pieces of the strategy that they are best placed to address. We recognise that the local reaction to the increased global attention on child marriage can vary in different regions and countries: a global movement brings legitimacy to a hitherto ignored problem in some areas, while it may prove unhelpful in others. The specific local contexts will therefore inform how individual members take on different aspects of this strategy and interact with the rest of the Partnership.

Strategic objectives

A. Major inter-governmental processes and fora commit to taking action on child marriage

Sub-objectives:

- Child marriage is included as a target in the post-2015 development framework;
- Other major influential international and regional fora commit to taking action on child marriage;
- Child marriage is addressed in the comments and recommendations of global and regional human rights bodies, including the UN Human Rights Council.

Girls Not Brides will focus in particular on getting child marriage included in the post-2015 development framework. We see this process as a key opportunity to influence global development priorities, and to help guide political and funding commitments over the coming decades. Child marriage could be used as a concrete measure to track progress on any new goal focused on the needs and rights of girls and women. It is a well-defined and measurable data point, with clear links to a range of interconnected development and human rights outcomes. If there is no progress made towards ending child marriage, many other development goals will also not be met.

Other inter-governmental processes and fora – including the African Union – are avenues where *Girls Not Brides* can encourage governments to make strong collective commitments on addressing child marriage, and provide opportunities to hold governments accountable to these. Various human rights bodies around the world, including the UN Human Rights Council, also offer processes and mechanisms through which *Girls Not Brides* can bring attention to the importance of upholding government obligations to protect the rights of girls.

As a global partnership, *Girls Not Brides* will focus efforts on processes and fora where global and national commitments have the greatest likelihood of making a positive impact on the lives of the girls affected by the practice.

Working towards achieving this objective will require advocacy at the global, regional and national levels, with global messages reflecting the needs and realities of local communities. These efforts will need to be supported by concerted media outreach and communications activities and new champions who have influence with decision-makers at all levels.

B. The evidence base on child marriage has increased

Sub-objectives:

- Knowledge about child marriage and effective interventions is readily available to a wide range of stakeholders;
- Efforts are underway to define what a comprehensive response to child marriage involves in different contexts.

An effective response to child marriage requires a greater understanding of the different approaches needed and an increase in the evidence base on what it will take to end the practice, including in the sensitive areas related to changing traditions and social norms. While policy and financial commitments are fundamental, these will not lead to sustainable change unless there is a sound understanding of what programmes work and why.

As a global partnership, *Girls Not Brides* will not focus on conducting research, but rather on ensuring that new and existing evidence – particularly on the solutions to child marriage and on insights emerging from non-traditional sources – is shared widely. It will also pay special attention to highlighting critical gaps in knowledge and encouraging partners to fill these gaps.

We know that child marriage is a complex issue, and that bringing an end to it will require action from a wide range of stakeholders. *Girls Not Brides* will therefore support efforts to explore what a comprehensive response needs to include, and how such a response may need to be tailored in different contexts.

In addition, *Girls Not Brides* will focus on facilitating expert discussions and the creation of common resources that will advance the field overall, for example by developing a common Theory of Change on child marriage for use by all stakeholders as a framework to define their own activities.

C. Country-wide efforts to address child marriage are supported and highlighted

Sub-objectives:

- Advances around the world towards achieving large-scale and sustainable positive change in the child marriage situation enjoy increased visibility;
- In countries at a tipping point, stakeholders coordinate their efforts and work together towards a nation-wide response to child marriage.

Many promising approaches to addressing child marriage have touched the lives of a relatively small number of girls. If we want to achieve transformative change for girls around the world within a generation, more action is needed to tackle child marriage at a large scale, particularly at a national level.

As a global partnership, *Girls Not Brides* can bring attention to actions from around the world that have the potential to substantially advance national efforts to end child marriage. Recognising that different countries are at very different stages, these actions may vary significantly. Instituting appropriate laws, for example, may signal a major advance in some contexts whereas progress in others may be linked to the widespread implementation of targeted programmes.

We also recognise that there are a few high-prevalence countries where there is now interest and leadership from a range of stakeholders – including government, civil society and donors – to tackle child marriage in a more comprehensive manner in the medium term. For *Girls Not Brides*, encouraging and highlighting the experience of these countries at a ‘tipping point’ will be important; it will help us demonstrate that change is possible at a large scale, and that bringing an end to child marriage can have a positive impact on society.

In particular *Girls Not Brides* will continue to advocate for the coordination of efforts to end child marriage in these countries, the development and implementation of nation-wide plans and the meaningful inclusion of civil society in nation-wide responses.

D. Increased funding is available globally to support effective efforts to address child marriage

Sub-objectives:

- New and existing donors and high-prevalence country governments fund efforts to end child marriage;
- Donors and high-prevalence country governments support more evidence-based efforts;
- *Girls Not Brides* members can access increased funding for effective programmes.

Significant change on the ground requires adequate resourcing to support programmatic work. *Girls Not Brides* will therefore continue to advocate for an increase in long-term funding to address child marriage, from both existing and potential new donors. Recognising that a sustainable response to child marriage will also require financial commitments from the governments of high-prevalence countries, *Girls Not Brides* will also explore opportunities to develop the appropriate tools and messaging to make the case to relevant government ministries.

Funding for child marriage may take different forms, including dedicated allocations to the issue and as a focus area within other related programmes, such as education and maternal health. To ensure that available funding has maximum impact, *Girls Not Brides* will continue to encourage donors to coordinate their efforts. We will also provide advice on how donors could better target their funding to support effective interventions, particularly at the grassroots level.

For the members of *Girls Not Brides*, a lack of funding often constitutes a major barrier in their work. We will therefore continue to identify and share opportunities for members to apply for funding, and advocate for increased funding to support their work.

E. The global movement to end child marriage continues to grow and strengthen

Sub-objectives:

- New influential individual and organisational champions – including youth advocates – from diverse spheres join the global movement and take action to end child marriage;
- *Girls Not Brides* members are empowered and engaged, working collaboratively to end child marriage;
- Expansion in *Girls Not Brides* membership and diversity boosts the global Partnership's credibility and potential for impact;
- *Girls Not Brides* enjoys greater visibility and is increasingly identified as a go-to authority on child marriage.

Girls Not Brides is one part of a much broader vibrant and growing global movement committed to ending child marriage. We are committed to continuing to build this global movement, by educating and engaging with a range of stakeholders, including potential new champions, religious and traditional leaders, youth advocates and committed individuals from around the world, who may have influence at the local, national, regional and international levels. In particular, *Girls Not Brides* has a responsibility to ensure that the voices of girls and women affected by the practice of child marriage are reflected throughout our work.

Girls Not Brides will continue to explore new opportunities and communications tools to foster increased collaboration, learning and capacity building between its members. These efforts will help ensure that the wide breadth of members feel empowered and engaged, and encourage a sense of global solidarity. In certain national contexts, collaboration between members may take the form of a national partnership. *Girls Not Brides* will continue to work with, and to highlight the efforts of, these nascent national groups, particularly as they work towards advancing the overall *Girls Not Brides* objectives within their national contexts.

The Partnership itself also needs to focus on making sure that it is as strong, representative and credible as possible, and that members are able to work together effectively. To this end, *Girls Not Brides* will continue to reach out to potential new members, with a specific focus on currently under-represented areas of focus and regions of the world, such as the Middle East and North Africa and Latin America.

In addition, *Girls Not Brides* will continuously seek to boost the visibility and credibility of the global Partnership and the work of members by continuing to position the Partnership as a go-to authority on child marriage and through concerted outreach to digital and traditional media.

Role of the secretariat

The secretariat of *Girls Not Brides* aims to play a facilitating and galvanising role, empowering and encouraging members to come together and identifying and highlighting opportunities for collective action and capacity building. In certain situations, the secretariat is called upon to take on more of a leadership role, in driving specific actions and processes, making the case to diverse stakeholders of the need to act on child marriage or in presenting the collective work and views of the Partnership.

For the secretariat, there are a number of comparative advantages that will help to guide its activities in advancing the strategic objectives. We recognise that the role and perception of the secretariat can vary, depending on the area of work and stakeholders involved; it is sometimes viewed as a 'resource hub', a

neutral expert on child marriage, an individual non-governmental organisation or as the voice of a broad civil society movement.

The secretariat is not a funding body, nor can it provide tailored individualised services. Its main focus is on identifying and encouraging specific actions from the Partnership that will help advance the achievement of the strategic objectives as we work together to end child marriage and enable every girl to achieve her full potential.