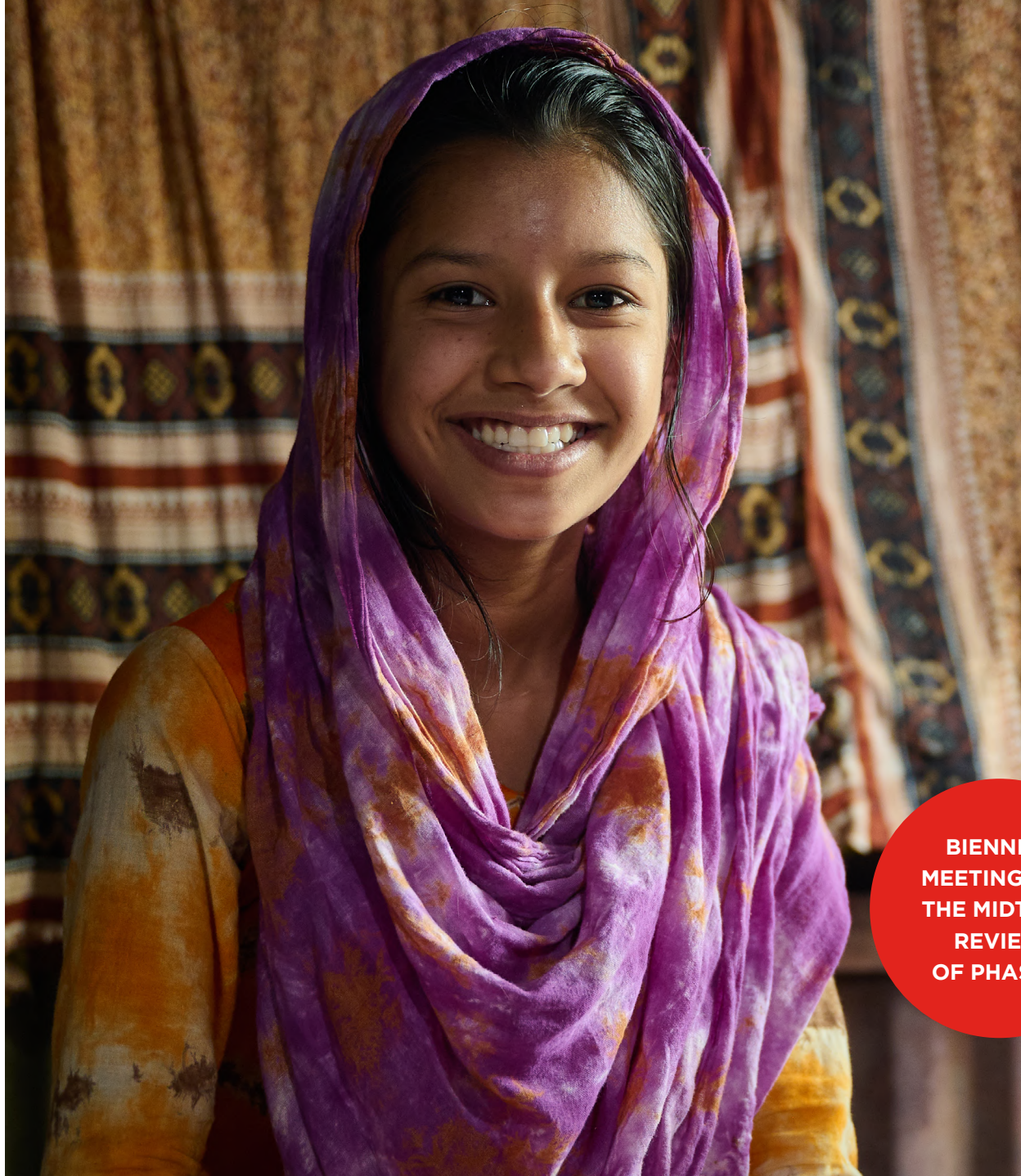UNFPA-UNICEF
**GLOBAL PROGRAMME
TO END CHILD MARRIAGE**

BRILLIANT MINDS, BOLD APPROACHES, BETTER RESULTS

BIENNIAL MEETING FOR THE MIDTERM REVIEW OF PHASE II

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BIENNIAL MEETING FOR THE MIDTERM REVIEW OF PHASE II

CONTENTS

LIST OF ACRONYMS

CEFM	child, early and forced marriage
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
CSO	civil society organization
CRANK	Child Marriage Research to Action Network
HRC	Human Rights Council
LGBTQI+	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex +
NHRI	national human rights institution
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SRH	sexual and reproductive health
SRHR	sexual and reproductive health and rights
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UPR	Universal Periodic Review

INTRODUCTION

In January 2020, the second phase of the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage (the Global Programme) was launched following an independent evaluation and a consultative design process with key stakeholders within and outside UNFPA and UNICEF. Phase II (2020–2023) aims to accelerate actions to end child marriage by enhancing investments and support for both unmarried and married adolescent girls; engaging key actors (including young people as agents of change) in catalysing shifts towards positive gender norms, including the right to choose if, when and whom to marry; increasing political support, domestic resources, gender-responsive policies and frameworks; engendering respect for laws, including international humanitarian law; and improving data and evidence on what works. The Global Programme contributes to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, specifically SDG target 5.3 to eliminate all harmful practices, especially child, early and forced marriage (CEFM).

Immediately after the start of Phase II, the Global Programme had to adapt and alter programme strategies to respond to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Since the start of the pandemic, the Global Programme has grappled with an exacerbation of risk factors that drive child marriage: sexual and gender-based violence, social and economic insecurity and gender inequality; weakened state and legal authority; and breakdowns in community social support services. In response, the programme has been designing and implementing COVID-19-sensitive programming that allows for the prevention of child marriage and mitigation of its effects, even in the face of infectious outbreaks. By ensuring individual and community-targeted messaging and support, through a combination of risk communication and community engagement approaches and service delivery, and anticipating potentially disruptive COVID-19 waves, the programme continues to meet its original objectives and deliver results.

However, even under this ever-evolving 'new normal', the SDG 5.3 ambition of eliminating child marriage by 2030 remains, and the need to share bold approaches to meet the target has never been greater. With that in mind, the biennial meeting of the Global Programme was held in an all-new digital format. On 19–21 October 2021, the online event gathered today's leading experts, innovators and UNFPA and UNICEF staff involved in the Global Programme for powerful, inspired and practical conversations across a range of topics related to effective child marriage programming and policies. Together, 364 meeting participants explored how to get back on track to meeting the elimination goal, solutions for scaled-up responses, new models for effective programming in a COVID-19 world and much more.

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Vision and objectives of the biennial meeting

To open the biennial meeting, Cornelius Williams of UNICEF and Anneka Knutsson of UNFPA spoke of the agencies' shared vision to accelerate the end of child marriage. They explored the setbacks caused by COVID-19, concluded that progress is possible and expressed appreciation for the partnerships that exist in commitment and solidarity.

The vision and objectives of the biennial meeting were to:

- Take stock of the evolving programming ecosystem, with a focus on the COVID-19 pandemic, looking at risk factors for girls at risk of child marriage and married girls
- Review evidence-informed strategies and programme approaches towards contributing to gender transformation
- Bring together global child marriage experts to contribute towards a common vision of meeting the SDG 5.3 by 2030
- Provide an opportunity for networking and strengthening a global community of practice with global experts, practitioners, policymakers, researchers, young people and others.

Top 10 takeaways from the biennial meeting

1 **No region is on track to achieve SDG 5.3**, and COVID-19 has set the agenda further back. There is a need for localization, integration and partnerships to accelerate action to offset this negative impact, end harmful practices and achieve gender equality.

2 **The evidence base on child marriage is growing**, but there is a need to obtain context-specific knowledge, better evidence on what works and does not work to end child marriage, innovative measurement practices and more research led by researchers from low- and middle-income countries.

3 **When programmes are well-documented, agencies and organizations are able to learn more**, adapt their strategies, connect with communities and advocate more effectively. Documentation and the use of learnings in policy development and programming have to be incentivized and require adequate capacities.

4 **Fulfilling our mission under COVID-19 conditions demands sustained advocacy** with governments for maintaining access to critical health, education and protection services; leveraging social protection mechanisms for girls and their families; building partnerships with grass-roots and women-led organizations and movements for outreach to communities; and mixing digital and face-to-face approaches based on the specific context.

5 **Adolescent digital engagement has the potential for innovation with and for young people**. Engage youth meaningfully through digital spaces but consider the value proposition ('what's in it for them?') before the technology. Engagement must be long-term, with two-way communication, and mindful of the digital divide in order to leave no one behind.

6 **Never has it been more important to leave no one behind**. In an increasingly unequal world, driven by COVID-19 and the digital divide, girls with disabilities, already married girls and LGBTQI+ youth need to be heard, seen and served. Programming adaptations made in recent times have opened up new possibilities for upholding their rights.

7 **Gender-transformative programming has gone from 'the side-lines' to the mainstream** and is now an institutional commitment for both UNFPA and UNICEF. To address the structural causes of gender inequality and child marriage, resources and power need to be shifted and rebalanced. This means investing in critical pathways of change, including gender-synchronized approaches promoting the empowerment of girls and positive masculinities for boys.

8 **Taking a human rights-based approach means asking who has to be reached (which girls are most affected), why (what are the root causes), who has an obligation to do something about it and what, and how can duty bearers be held to account?** Diverse human rights accountability mechanisms are real, practical tools to advance the agenda to end child marriage, as shown in examples from across the globe during the meeting *(see page 23)*.

9 **Child marriage is being addressed through health, education and protection systems and services in humanitarian settings**, by empowering adolescent girls to lead change and by partnering with different actors, including governments and youth-led feminist organizations. Nevertheless, there are gaps still to be filled: there is a need for more preventative work, relevant and accessible digital innovations, services that are more adolescent-friendly, increased visibility of girls in data, programme evaluations and continued advocacy to prioritize child marriage in humanitarian contexts.

10 **The commitments to end child marriage expressed by the Global Programme donors are multisectoral**, whether targeting child marriage directly or through support to gender equality, young people, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), education, social protection or research. Core, flexible and long-term support to feminist movements are also key to advancing the agenda.

BOLD VOICES

According to **Purity Kagwiria, Director of With and For Girls Fund at Purposeful,** girls and women are always at the forefront of change and influence their communities in imaginative and creative ways, but they need resources. She advocated funders on adapting their frameworks to allocate financial resources to girl-led organizations.

Meenakshi Ruhela, Programme Coordinator at Pravah, explained the critical importance of creating space for girls to learn how to negotiate with their families and other stakeholders. Increased opportunities for dialogue, including intergenerational dialogue, help to build a supportive ecosystem for girls where they have greater agency in decision-making processes.

GROUNDED IN SCIENCE: DATA, EVIDENCE AND LEARNING

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The new context: Impact of the pandemic on child marriage

In her presentation on child marriage trends and the impact of COVID-19, Claudia Cappa of UNICEF discussed how data show that no region is on track to eliminate child marriage by 2030. According to pre-COVID-19 projections, 100 million girls will become child brides over the next decade. As a result of COVID-19, 10 million additional girls are now at risk of becoming child brides by 2030.

Progress is possible but implies significant shifts. Data show that we need to look at developments that occurred over the past 25 years across several sectors. Equal opportunities are essential for girls' futures. Countries that have seen significant progress in ending child marriage have also seen improvements in economic development and poverty reduction, access to quality employment and educational attainment. Child marriage becomes a less compelling path when meaningful alternatives are available to girls. Gains in the areas of poverty alleviation, access to education and quality employment are key to end child marriage. We cannot afford to lose these gains, especially given the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Taking the field forward: Evidence on what works to end child marriage
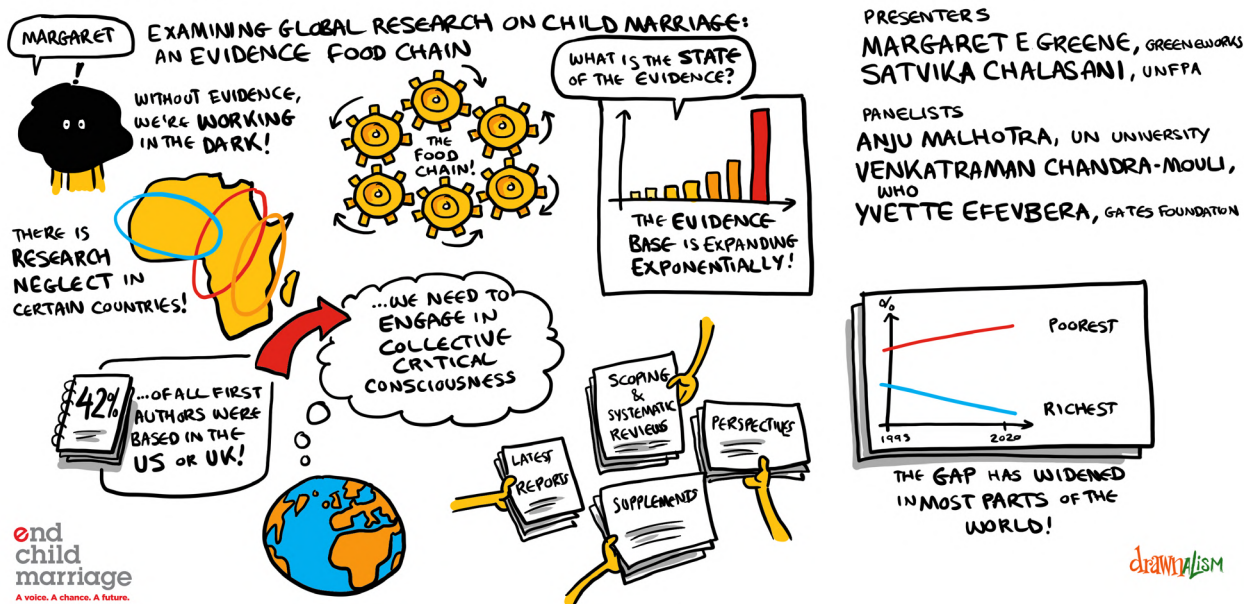
In a thought-provoking session on evidence, participants learned that **the evidence base on child marriage is expanding exponentially but context matters.** According to experts, more research is needed on interventions to prevent or address child marriage, for subnational data, on consequences beyond health and across the life-course, and on how to partner with governments and civil society organizations (CSOs). Innovation in measurement is needed, including documenting our failures. Research and collaboration in the child marriage field must be decolonized. And finally, the evidence must guide us, not just our beliefs. The Global Programme team shared how they endeavour to ensure the evidence produced is of high quality, responds to 'the gaps' and is shared widely.

The session on evidence started with a presentation by Margaret Greene of GreeneWorks, supported by Manahil Siddiqi, an independent consultant. The presentation highlighted the importance of research: without evidence, we are operating in the dark. The evidence base on child marriage is expanding exponentially, but more research is needed on interventions to prevent child marriage. Some countries are well-researched (e.g., Ethiopia and India), whereas there are gaps in research coverage of high-prevalence countries that need to be filled (e.g., in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan and Sudan). Most of the research on child marriage is in English, and 42 per cent of all first authors of studies in the child marriage database set up by Greene and Siddiqi are based in the United States of America or the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Hence, research and collaboration must be decolonized by nurturing equitable partnerships between the global North and South.

The key gaps in research are: the need for a greater agreement on the measurement of interventions; the need to take into account the impact of COVID-19 on prevention programming; the need to understand rich countries and their inability to implement laws; and the need for more research on men's role in child marriage. There is also the need for a broader understanding of all parts of the evidence system and their connections to ensure that evidence informs policies and programming. This includes generating evidence through implementation and evaluation, synthesizing evidence and creating trustworthy guidance and disseminating evidence to policymakers, implementers, advocates and researchers *(see Figure 1)*.

FIGURE 1. Evidence food chain

Generate evidence through implementation, monitoring and evaluation

Synthesize evidence and create trustworthy guidance

Disseminate evidence to policymakers, implementers, advocates and researchers
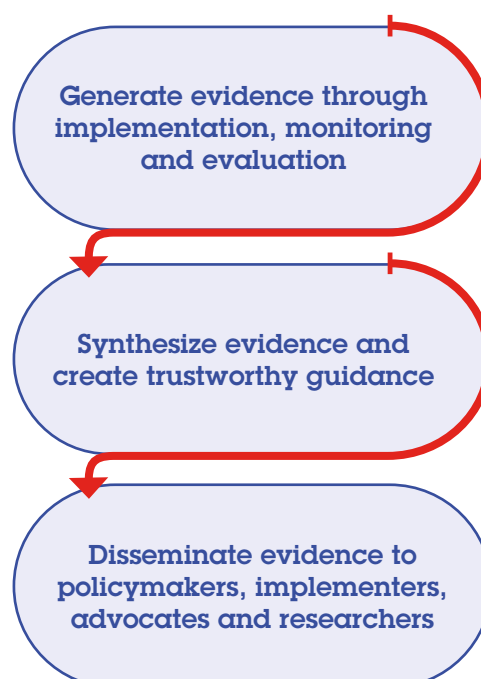
How to ensure evidence is used? Develop research tools and policy briefs and convene meetings to discuss and disseminate evidence at the global, country and local levels.

Going forward, there is also the need to tackle the challenge of inequity. The gap in child marriage prevalence between the richest and poorest households has widened in most parts of the world, but the good news is that the richest households everywhere are abandoning child marriage. Social norms are more likely to change when there are greater economic opportunities. It is the role of research to unravel the pathways of change and to inform programming and practice.

What are the priority gaps in evidence and research on child marriage?

While there is an increasing amount of global and national data, the child marriage sector needs more granular subnational and district-level data that are annual and disaggregated by sex and age. We need research that goes beyond the health consequences of child marriage – we need evidence on marriage transitions: what happens when marriages end through separation, divorce or widowhood? We need more evidence on the effectiveness of different interventions in order to concentrate on the interventions that are most effective in a given context. We need implementation research on delivery platforms in the poorest communities where institutions are weak; on the role of CSOs and the support they need in regions where governments are weak; and on what only CSOs can do. We need to learn about large-scale programmes and how to harness them to prevent child marriage, especially during and after COVID-19. We need to learn from failures and mistakes, so agencies are able to stop what does not work and focus on what is effective.

– **Venkatraman Chandra-Mouli,** World Health Organization

What are some new and promising ideas and entry points that need further research and evidence to support learning and innovation?

A context-specific understanding of what works to prevent child marriage at scale is needed. So is innovation in measurement of marital dynamics – for example, marital choice or forced marriage and how they relate to the agency and empowerment of girls. To identify the alternatives to marriage for girls and young women, researchers could ask what it looks like to create alternatives for girls and young women. Further, we need to push the boundaries of what stakeholders we bring in to produce knowledge and to challenge ourselves with the question of whose voices are heard?

– **Yvette Efevbera**, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

What evidence do we need to support to take promising strategies to scale? What are the opportunities we should be leveraging to integrate child marriage interventions and implementation research into larger scale initiatives, across sectors, actors and structures?

The scale and success of current interventions will not end child marriage by 2030. Programmes are over-optimistic, generic and face numerous implementation challenges. Multicomponent programmes have a poor track record of going to scale because: they have no sectoral home, ownership, systems or infrastructure; they rely on donor funds rather than national financing; and they are not being implemented with scale-up pathways embedded in programme strategies from the beginning. Single sector (and multipath) programmes that promote education and job options have been consistently successful by: enhancing girls' human capital and skills and creating alternatives to marriage; and changing norms to regard girls as children and as potential earners, rather than as wives. Poverty reduction and incentive programmes do not automatically generate lasting benefits for girls. They need to include components that result in the empowerment of girls and women.

Important pathways for taking programming to end child marriage to scale include working with the more powerful and well-funded sectors by engaging and influencing education and health sectors and integrating child marriage indicators. Instead of small, stand-alone programmes, help governments and the private sector to deliver ambitious and effective key initiatives and move beyond policy commitments to secure resources, infrastructure and implementation capacities. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, innovate and seize opportunities to improve systems and structures in key sectors: the education sector presents huge opportunities beyond cash transfers through digital and remote learning; as employment sectors adjust, where will women and girls fit? Look at the evidence, not our belief systems, to guide us in the future.

– **Anju Malhotra**, United Nations University

How the Global Programme is advancing research
Research strategy

- Effectiveness of interventions
- Implementation research
- Looking at under-researched 'at-risk groups'
- Understanding secular changes in marriage, such as macro trends (demographics, economics, social, etc.) and how they impact child marriage
- Gender-transformative approaches as an overall strategy

STAR Initiative: Partnership between the Global Programme and the UNICEF Office of Research–Innocenti to provide support to UNFPA and UNICEF country offices on the priority research agenda.

Child Marriage Research to Action Network (CRANK): Partnership between the Global Programme and Girls Not Brides to support dissemination and uptake of research globally.

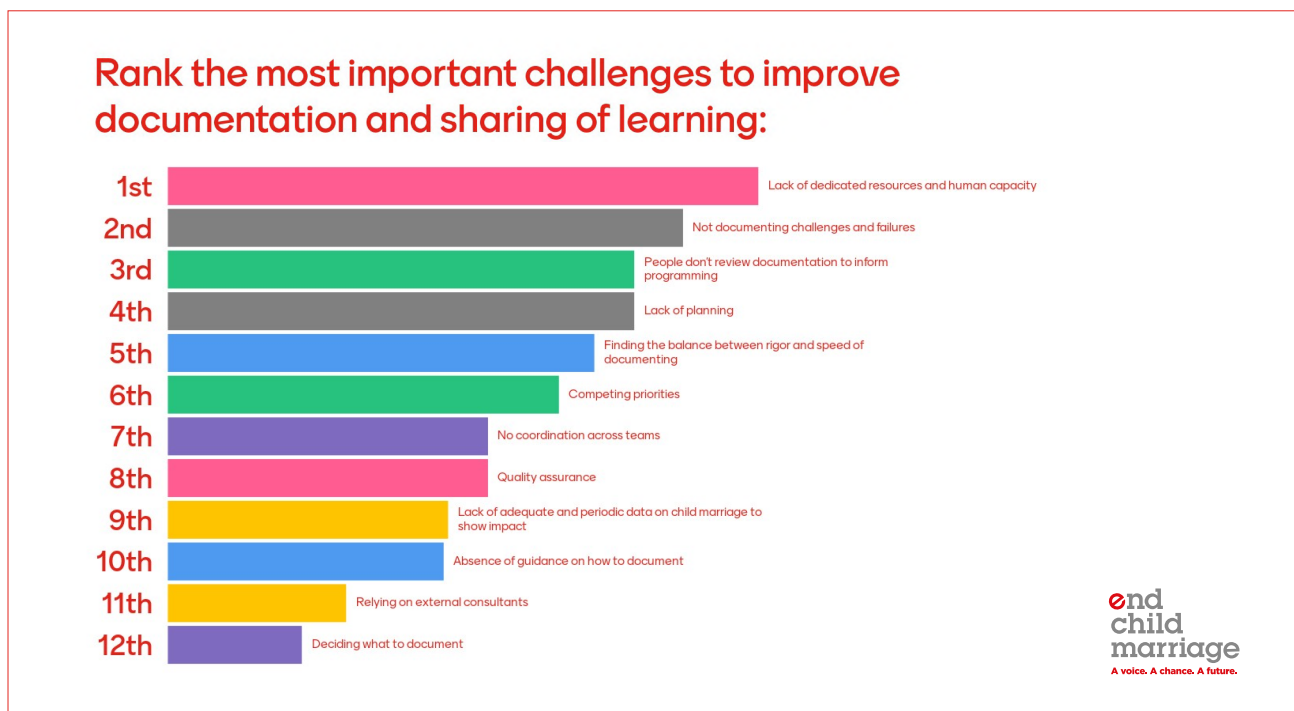## A commitment to learning: Documenting, sharing and using lessons learned

In an important session on knowledge management, Ivan Butina of UNICEF gave an overview of UNICEF's global knowledge management strategy with knowledge management defined as the capture, organization, sharing and use of knowledge for improved organizational performance towards development and humanitarian results for children. **The documentation of knowledge, including lessons learned, failures and good practices, is critical to: learning, so programmers can do better in the future; evidence-based advocacy targeting governments and catalysing investments; and improvement of awareness in the community**.

Several challenges to improving documentation and sharing of learning were identified *(see Figure 2)*. Working group discussions on these challenges concluded that incentives need to be developed for documentation, along with capacity-building for UNFPA and UNICEF country offices and their partners.

The possibility of co-creating approaches to documentation was explored, as was the conversion of lessons into stories that can be translated into local languages and shared with communities.

Figure 2. How do you rank the most important challenges to improve documentation and sharing of learning?

Rank the most important challenges to improve documentation and sharing of learning:

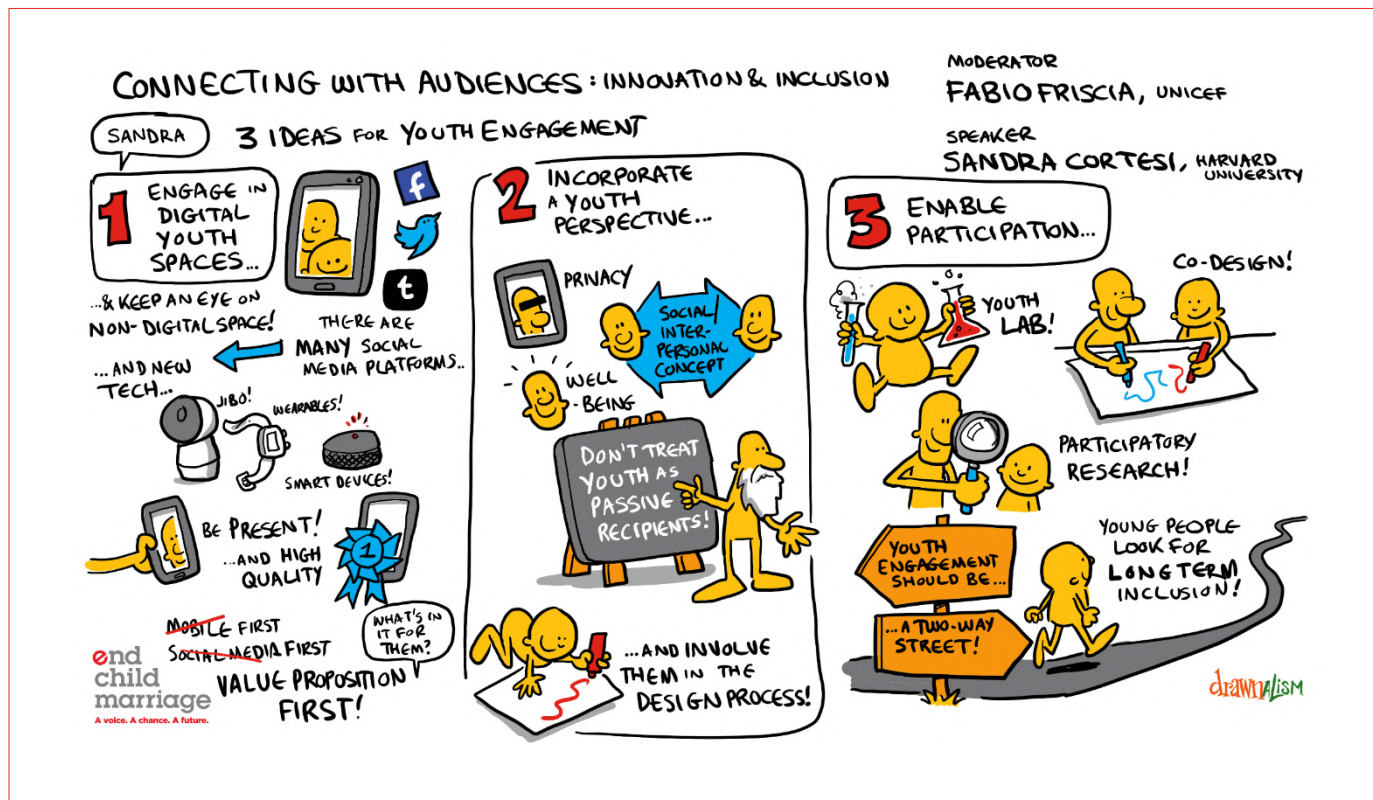|	
1st	Lack of dedicated resources and human capacity
2nd	Not documenting challenges and failures
3rd	People don't review documentation to inform programming
4th	Lack of planning
5th	Finding the balance between rigor and speed of documenting
6th	Competing priorities
7th	No coordination across teams
8th	Quality assurance
9th	Lack of adequate and periodic data on child marriage to show impact
10th	Absence of guidance on how to document
11th	Relying on external consultants
12th	Deciding what to document

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NEW WAYS FOR A NEW WORLD

Connecting with audiences: Innovation and inclusion

Sandra Cortesi, fellow at the Berkman Klein Centre for Internet and Society at Harvard University and the Director of Youth and Media, engaged in a key discussion on adolescent digital engagement. She noted the importance of engaging in digital spaces but to keep an eye on non-digital activities of youth too. An increasing number of youth are beginning to question the value of digital technologies. Digital technologies, including social media platforms, will remain a key component of young people's lives but it is crucial that adults are present and that engagement with young people is of high quality and informed by youth communities and activities that send other signals, including a desire to, at times, disconnect from the digital world and have non-digital experiences.

Consider creating value propositions first, before looking at digital technologies: Support youth in better understanding why they should engage, what's 'in it for them', how it connects with challenges in their daily lives, and how it adds value.

Incorporate a youth perspective, being aware that there is value in different conceptual understandings: By directly involving youth in the design process, develop products that address young people's needs, interests and experiences. The global issues that impact young people's lives are diverse, ranging from a lack of quality education, concerns around privacy, good health and well-being, environmental issues, lack of economic opportunity and employment, and gender equality and empowerment of girls.

Enable participation (online and offline) by connecting to youth goals: Youth engagement should be a two-way street – youth are excited to share their viewpoints and perspectives on societal issues with international organizations and feel it is important that they receive feedback on their inputs, creating pathways for mutual exchange and collaboration. When creating youth engagement opportunities, consider designing longer term programmes that are supported financially and connect youth participants with adult mentors who can offer consistent career counselling and exposure to career pathways that blend their skills and interests and allow youth to have a positive impact on society.

Digital connectivity remains a critical issue: During COVID-19, agencies and organizations tried to move to the digital world but it was a difficult time as many young people did not have high quality technology at home or share digital devices with family members. It is important to strengthen community-based institutions, such as libraries, where young people can connect digitally.

Addressing child marriage wherever and whenever it happens: A focus on humanitarian settings

Building on the consultation on child marriage in humanitarian settings in Jordan in 2020, Caroline Masboungi from UNICEF, Marta Gil from Terre des Hommes and Humaira Farhanaz from UNFPA identified continuing challenges to getting humanitarian actors to be responsive to the issue of child marriage, including the lack of visibility for girls' needs in humanitarian settings.

They summarized how child marriage is being addressed through health, education and protection systems and services, the empowerment of adolescent girls, the involvement of fathers and mothers, particularly through adolescent-led change, and by broadening partnerships beyond the big international organizations to work with youth feminist organizations.

For these experts, more needs to be done in: prevention work, including through digital innovations; making services more child- and adolescent-friendly; increasing the visibility of girls in data; engaging youth in humanitarian responses to child marriage, including working with adolescent-led campaigns; conducting programme evaluations and greater advocacy to prioritize this issue.

Satvika Chalasani of UNFPA summarized the value of the Global Programme to the issue of child marriage in humanitarian settings as the generation of evidence, advocacy for increased visibility and mainstreaming approaches in humanitarian responses and nexus programming.

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LONG-STANDING COMMITMENTS: GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE AND HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED PROGRAMMING

A commitment to SDG 5: Strengthening gender-transformative programming to end child marriage
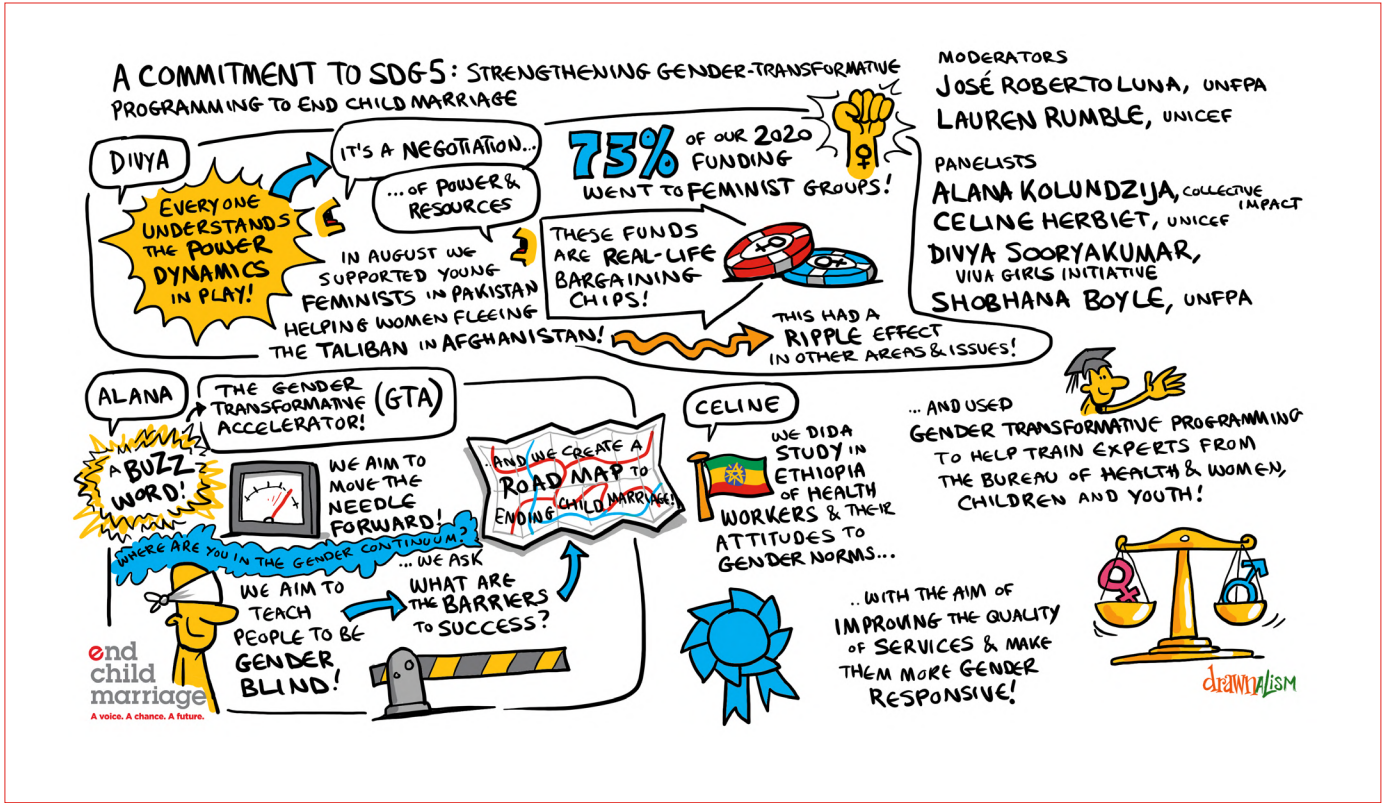
UNFPA and UNICEF have institutional commitments to gender-transformative programming and have moved it from the sidelines to the forefront of their new strategic plans (2022–2025). UNFPA and UNICEF want to support the reimagining of a gender-transformative world that has no place for child marriage.

FIGURE 3. What does gender transformation mean to you?

In a session on how agencies can strengthen gender-transformative programming, Divya Sooryakumar from MADRE explained how gender transformation is about negotiating power and control over resources. Agencies need to take bold actions to support girl-led and feminist networks as core pillars of gender-transformative programming and catalysts for transforming power dynamics. As a funder, MADRE is reimagining grant making to make funding accessible to young feminists. Sooryakumar stated it clearly, "We have no more time to waste! There are too many overlapping crises, including the climate crisis and multiple economic crises. When we trust the leadership of girls, we see action – they know when to act when the moment calls for it. Resourcing women and girls has a ripple effect. We need to think of ourselves in a broader ecosystem where we can find new partnerships and radically change our approaches to reach girls and women as needed. Women's and girls' organizations bring value by their presence and action. We have learned from the UN Women's Trust Fund how to engage with smaller women's organizations working on rights issues and build capacities and open up space for them to engage with United Nations agencies."

Alana Kolundzija from Collective Impact noted that gender-transformative approaches have become a buzzword. She elaborated, "That is good because it garners excitement and people want to be a part of it, but the downside is that it can be misunderstood and programmes claim to be gender-transformative when they are not. Gender-transformative approaches are really about shifting power and resources and addressing the structural causes of unequal access to resources and opportunities. Through the Global Programme, Collective Impact has trialled the Gender-Transformative Accelerator tool in four countries of the Global Programme, and this is helping country offices of UNFPA and UNICEF to identify how to move forward with their gender-transformative programming to end child marriage. We are seeing positive examples of how countries are using their road maps for action."

Ethiopia and India are two of the countries that have piloted the Gender-Transformative Accelerator tool. Celine Herbiet from UNICEF Ethiopia explained how the country office invested in several promising pathways for adolescent girl empowerment and ending child marriage. A baseline study in Ethiopia had found that the views of the health workforce were not in line with the Global Programme goals for ending child marriage. Hence, the office needed to address the attitudes and behaviours of the service providers, in addition to those of community members, to tackle the underlying drivers of child marriage.

Shobhana Boyle from UNFPA India shared how the Global Programme supported promising initiatives to promote positive masculinities. The key for success was to integrate the work on masculinities across sectors and among communities, service providers and policymakers – not keep it as a stand-alone initiative. Addressing harmful masculinities does not equal engaging men and boys only, and challenging harmful masculinities creates dissonance and disruption. When facing backlash, it is important to invest adequate resources and time to respond to this. Agencies need to create solidarity and recognize that masculinities exist in different forms. They have to show how harmful masculinities hurt men, and they have to create an environment that allows people to thrive when they try out non-traditional gender identities.

Jose Roberto Luna from UNFPA noted that agencies need to shift power and resources to address structural causes of gender inequality. When there is power, there is resistance, and there are counter movements working against a gender equal world. Are we ready to tackle racism, sexism, ableism and adultism? Can we make sure the economic systems are accessible to everyone? We want the Global Programme to create pathways to change structures and generate investments and public resources for adolescent girls related to bodily autonomy and transforming harmful masculinities and gender stereotyping. The Gender-Transformative Accelerator tool is a way to transform the reality and discourse into real pathways to move towards a transformative way of working on gender equality.

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Child marriage and human rights accountability: To respect, to protect and to fulfil
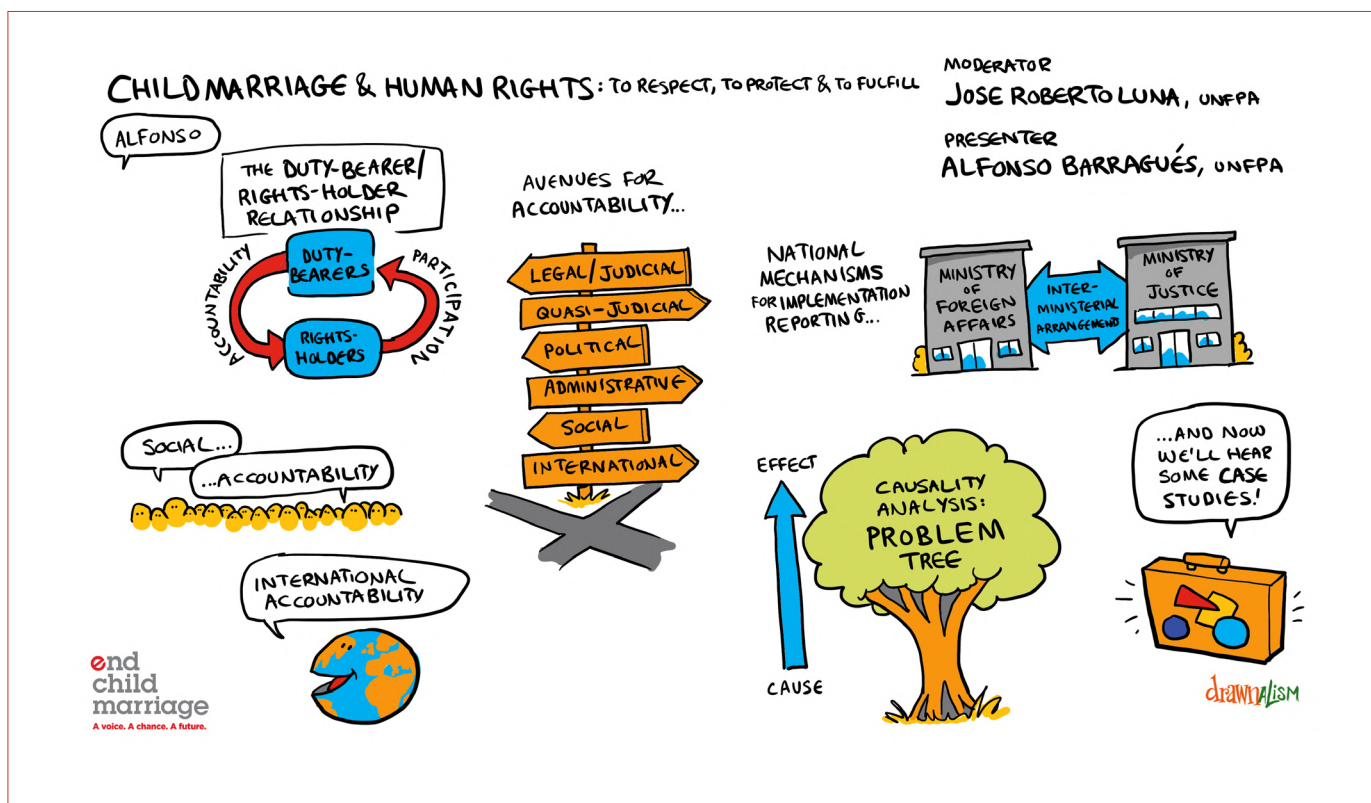
We all can advance accountability for ending child marriage, whether that is social, administrative, political, legal, quasi-judicial or international accountability (*see Table 1*). Human rights and accountability are not just lofty principles, they are tools to achieve real change. In a session on human rights and accountability, we heard examples from across the world, from Latin America to Mozambique and Uganda, from Maldives to Kyrgyzstan.

Alfonso Barragués from UNFPA started the conversation with a presentation explaining that in 2019, the Human Rights Council (HRC) adopted Resolution 41/8 expressing concern on prevailing impunity and lack of accountability in ending CEFM, including lack of access to justice, particularly at the community level. The resolution identifies avenues to enhance accountability on CEFM, including: addressing obstacles faced by victims to access justice and remedies; recognizing that the criminalization alone of CEFM is insufficient when introduced without complementary measures to address the root causes of the practice; and holding accountable duty bearers in positions of authority, such as teachers, religious leaders, traditional authorities, politicians and law enforcement officials. It also encourages national reports to treaty bodies, the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and Voluntary National Reviews to include information on progress towards eliminating CEFM.

Taking a human rights-based approach means asking: which girls are most affected, what are the root causes to why they are affected, who has an obligation to do something about it and what, and how do we hold them accountable? CEFM is a violation of human rights, and governments have specific obligations in international and national laws. Beyond legal protection, ending CEFM requires cross-sector and comprehensive responses to address underlying and root causes of the problem (gender discrimination, disempowerment, unequal social norms, etc.). Identification and strengthening of different avenues of accountability, including reporting to international human rights mechanisms, is critical for holding a broader range of duty bearers to account in a complementary and mutually reinforcing manner. We need to be context specific. Which human rights mechanism is the best to use in our context?

TABLE 1. Approaches to human rights accountability

Approaches	
Legal/judicial	Courts applying the law to protect rights
Quasi-judicial	National human rights institutions (NHRIs), child rights commissions, etc., investigate human rights violations and assess government policy progress
Political	Parliaments oversee government policies and budgets
Administrative	Government-led mechanisms including policies
Social	Budget and service delivery monitoring and social audits
International	Reporting to international human rights mechanisms

Figure 4. What type of human rights accountability has been used in the country where you work to end child marriage?

What level of human rights accountability has been used in the country where you work to end child marriage?

Administrative accountability	Social accountability	Political accountability	Legal accountability	International Accountability
5	16	14	14	10

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Following the introductory presentation, participants split into groups to discuss the different approaches to human rights accountability from around the world.

Mozambique: The UPR on girls› education and SRHR – Nordine Ferrao, UNFPA

The use of UPR to change a discriminatory law is a powerful tool to create opportunities for young people to interact directly with political rights holders to demand accountability. It is also important to advocate with community leaders who have the power to promote change in their communities.

The problem	Pregnant girls were prevented from attending day school, and many girls were unable to attend night school, which led to high numbers of pregnant girls dropping out of school.
Approach to human rights accountability	The United Nations-led Rapariga Biz girls' empowerment programme engaged partners in a coalition to petition and provided technical support to the Ministry of Gender to influence the Government's Order 39 for the Right of the Girl to Education.
The outcome	Pregnant girls were eventually allowed to attend day schools.

Uganda: Advocacy for returning pregnant girls to school in line with supported UPR recommendations – Florence Apuri Auma, UNFPA

The problem	Pregnant girls were not allowed to continue their education in regular schools.
Approach to human rights accountability	Successful advocacy by ministries, civil society and youth led to pressure to hold duty bearers to account. An inter-ministerial committee was established to review the national action plan to ensure it was in line with the UPR recommendations. Mutually reinforcing formal and informal approaches together achieved positive results.
The outcome	Change in law to enable pregnant girls to attend regular classes.

Eastern and Southern Africa: Regional human rights accountability – Anandita Philipose, UNFPA

The problem	Lack of conformity of child marriage laws in southern African countries.
Approach to human rights accountability	UNFPA worked with the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to develop a model law on child marriage, that is comprehensive, includes a section on budgetary considerations and can be used to develop or revise child marriage laws in different countries. Buy-in for child marriage laws at the national level was key to success. Parliamentarians played an active role in shaping the model law and then took the model law to their own country parliaments. South–South sharing is critical. Mozambique shared how they used the law nationally, and this generated interest from others. The SADC model law is one accountability mechanism but other actions are necessary, for example, sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services score cards help to build accountability.
The outcome	The SADC model law helped to shape marriage laws in countries in the region.

Maldives: Follow-up on UPR recommendations on comprehensive sexuality education with NHRI – Shadiya Ibrahim, UNFPA

The problem	Lack of SRH information and services, including comprehensive sexuality education due to a culture shaped by Islam and Sharia law.
Approach to human rights accountability	Using international human rights mechanisms was the only way to advocate a comprehensive sexual education and the provision of SRH information and services. UNFPA engaged young people, the civil society and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to advocate an access to SRH services to prevent child marriage. It was also critical to work with faith-based groups.
The outcome	Successful integration of SRH in the work of the NHRI.

Latin America and the Caribbean: Aliadas' advocacy with the ministries of women to include an indicator on child marriage into the Regional Gender Observatory – Shelly Abdool, UNICEF

The problem	Prior to the SDGs, child marriage was not considered as an important issue in the region.
Approach to human rights accountability	The United Nations worked in partnership with the civil society to engage regional human rights mechanisms to put CEFM on the political and social agenda.
The outcome	Child marriage is now included as a measure of the Regional Gender Observatory. CEFM rates are now seen as a key indicator for girls' rights.

Kyrgyzstan: Engaging with the United Nations human rights system to end child marriage – Lucio Valerio Sarandrea, UNICEF

The problem	Child marriage was legal in the country.
Approach to human rights accountability	The United Nations worked with the civil society to use different human rights mechanisms to convince parliamentarians and religious leaders that child marriage is a crime. In addition, videos and an app were used to reach children and youth to understand the causes of child marriage.
The outcome	A 2018 law made underage marriage illegal. The rates of child marriage have declined significantly.

GETTING BACK ON TRACK

Recommit and reimagine: New models for effective programming in a COVID-19 world

Between April and June 2021, an assessment was conducted of adaptations to the Global Programme in light of COVID-19 with the objectives of informing further adjustments and strengthening the programme globally. The assessment included all 12 programme countries and all implementation levels (global, regional, national and community). The assessment identified and analysed the Global Programme response, mitigation and protection measures adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic and considered the extent to which interventions were continued as planned, adjusted or postponed. The assessment questions were organized around the three criteria of relevance, effectiveness and coherence.

During the biennial meeting, lead evaluator Isabelle Cazottes presented the following findings and a series of recommendations.

COVID-19 assessment findings on relevance:
- Programme adjustments to COVID-19 sought to maintain the alignment with the Global Theory of Change Phase II as well as with national COVID-19 response strategies.

COVID-19 assessment findings on the effectiveness of the adjustments to the results of the Global Programme Phase II:
- The support to encourage adolescent girls to return to school once reopened showed some success but was not systematically monitored.
- The emphasis on mass and social media campaigns allowed a wider reach, although their potential to influence gender and social norms remains a concern.
- Systems-strengthening activities with governments exist, with a view to maintaining access to essential services.
- Small-scale initiatives to address economic empowerment were undertaken but linkages with social protection programmes were weak and limited to a few countries.
- Advocacy and technical support contributed to continue enhancing the capacity of governments to develop national and subnational plans related to ending child marriage, although at a smaller scale.

COVID-19 assessment findings on the effectiveness of support to country office programme adjustments:
- Timely guidance and tools were provided to country office programmes, but their operationalisation was challenging.
- Learnings from adjustments has the potential to shape future programming through:
  - The use of virtual methods to reach larger numbers of beneficiaries
  - Multipronged approaches to addressing gender norms or skills development
  - Flexibility in adjusting programming and in reallocating budgets
  - Leveraging of additional, non-Global Programme funds.

Coherence of adjustments with key related programmes:
- Adjustments were generally coherent between sectors within agencies and between agencies.

Top strategies for getting back on track to end child marriage by 2030

Regional focal points for the Global Programme discussed how the drivers and root causes of child marriage need to be targeted, along with localization, integration and partnership approaches and the identification of accelerators in order to get back on track to eliminate child marriage by 2030. They also highlighted the importance of being mindful that the impacts of COVID-19 have clearly exacerbated gender inequities, although these impacts are not yet fully clear.

Mona Aika from the UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office emphasized how the regional office and its partners in the region will target the drivers and root causes of child marriage, that is, address bride price; alleviate poverty and create more social protection programmes; and advocate public financing for children, for example, through the European Union-funded Spotlight Initiative. The region needs systems that are robust enough to sustain responses during emergencies. Some countries had strong enough systems to continue implementing interventions and increase gender-transformative programming during COVID-19.

The assessment identified and analysed the Global Programme response, mitigation and protection measures adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic and considered the extent to which interventions were continued as planned, adjusted or postponed.

Ramatou Toure from the UNICEF West and Central Africa Regional Office mentioned that there is a need to accelerate the rate of decline in child marriage by 25 times to eliminate the practice by 2030 in the region. The region has to accelerate progress, innovate and do things differently through the localization of strategies according to different drivers of child marriage in the Sahel and in coastal countries and differences between girls under 15 years of age and girls aged 16–18 years. The region has to move beyond separate multisectoral programmes and place child marriage at the heart of large-scale programmes in education, poverty reduction and health, capitalizing on the massive investments in education made during the pandemic (e.g., World Bank investments in education in Niger). Building partnerships with the World Bank and financial institutions that shape economic systems is important.

Shadia Elshiwy from the UNFPA Arab States Regional Office noted that COVID-19 led to increased prevalence of child marriage in the Middle East and North Africa. Actors in the region has to identify accelerators, strengthen partnerships and evidence-based programming and empower girls by building their health and social and economic assets to respond to this. The region also has to build financial literacy among girls, so they are able to advocate in their communities. All the work in the region has to use gender-transformative approaches and shift power towards girls and women.

Upala Devi from the UNFPA Asia and the Pacific Regional Office noted that while child marriage rates are declining in South Asia, huge gender inequities persist. Solutions include addressing social and behavioural change; ensuring the safe reopening of schools after the pandemic-induced closures; adapting and strengthening child protection services; providing social cash transfers; increasing access to SRH services and information; and making sure no girl is left behind through multisectoral approaches.

Looking ahead: The future of the Global Programme

In a session internal to the Global Programme, regional groups identified key approaches to get back on track towards the elimination of child marriage by 2030. Some of the approaches identified were:

- Leaving no one behind, including those with disabilities, married girls and those who identify as non-binary
- Gender-transformative approaches at many levels, including structures, services, communities, masculinities and girls' agency
- Paying more attention to the economic drivers and

socioeconomic differences in marriage patterns exacerbated by COVID-19
- Not forgetting the ongoing humanitarian crises beyond COVID-19
- The need to shift evidence gathering to focus on what works and going deeper into diagnostics in order to 'unpack and understand'.

West and Central Africa: In the West and Central Africa region, strategies to ensure no one is left behind involve working with young people, using mixed methods (traditional and digital), getting resources to the poorest families, including groups of young people with disabilities, and using the Gender-Transformative Accelerator tool for capacity-building. As a result of COVID-19, the region is using a nexus approach and ensuring that development approaches are embedded in humanitarian approaches. There is also discussion of mainstreaming work with men and boys.

Eastern and Southern Africa: In the East and Southern Africa region, integration within programmes, social protection (cash transfers) and the capacity-building of partners is critical to the work. The tracking of what is working and not working is underway, and evidence is important to address gender norms. Responding to the development and humanitarian nexus is crucial to improve.

Middle East and North Africa/Arab States: In the Middle East and North Africa/Arab States region, the focus of leaving no one behind is on the prevention of child marriage and working with both married and widowed girls. A multisectoral approach to programming is key. Changing norms in restrictive environments is hard, but work at the community level is critical and is a focus of the work in Yemen (for example, working with religious leaders, including female leaders). Safety and security concerns make the documenting of work difficult, as do time constraints.

South Asia: In the South Asia region, country offices want to understand how COVID-19 has impacted child marriage and what interventions are working. They also want to strengthen regional dialogue and expand partnerships. In order to leave no one behind in the region, differentiated programme approaches are critical, as are the social protection linkages of employability, skill development and school transition. There is a shift away from a project approach to investing in systems and real-time monitoring and building the capacity of UNFPA, UNICEF and their partners. Clarity is needed on the tension between community focus and scale, and a needs assessment of capacity in the Global Programme team and its partners, and where critical investments can happen, would be welcome.

SUPPORTING THE AGENDA: MEET THE GLOBAL PROGRAMME DONORS

The Global Programme is generously funded by the Governments of Belgium, Canada, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, the United Kingdom, the European Union and Zonta International. At the meeting, representatives from six donors participated in a panel to discuss their priorities linked to ending child marriage, their multisectoral commitments to ending child marriage, whether directly or through support to gender equality, young people, SRHR, education, social protection and research; their core, flexible and long-term support to feminist movements by supporting women-led organizations with feminist principles; combining support for feminist movement with work by other actors including governments and the United Nations; and working through diverse and collective action.

The Government of Canada launched a feminist international policy in 2017. It focuses on structural barriers to gender inequality such as the uneven burden of care, SRHR and barriers that keep girls from staying in school, especially in conflict situations, supporting women's rights organizations and eliminating harmful practices. Policy makes a difference in programming: Kathleen Flynn-Dapaah from the Government of Canada explained how they now focus on increasing investments in gender-based violence, including child marriage, at the level of the United Nations, with civil society and national partners. This is critical because COVID-19 is threatening to set us back. They have made it a priority to address the secondary impacts of COVID-19, promoting human rights, ensuring girls and boys have a voice and shape the agenda and investing in a range of partners to comprehensively address gender-based violence, SRH services, education, food security and gender inequality.

Patricia Pennetier from the European Union noted that they see the added value of women's rights organizations. The main challenge is gender inequality, and the transformation of gender norms is important to address this. Addressing child marriage as a social norm requires evidence, and women's organizations have that. They know the context and understand the causes. Support for the feminist movement must be combined with work by other actors. The key to success is working through diversity and collective action.

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SUPPORT FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS

"We need to provide unearmarked funding to work on their priorities and, during COVID-19, we need to ensure sustained support to women's organizations and UN Women's Trust Fund. Girls Not Brides is an important forum for building national level impact by partners. Creating national action plans is really powerful, and we need to harness that more. When the mechanisms exist for a multi-stakeholder group, the impact of change can be profound."

– Kathleen Flynn-Dapaah, Canada

"We consulted women's rights organizations last year, and they requested that donors do not reinvent the wheel – simplify application processes for funding. Representatives of women's organizations need to be in the room when decisions are being made, and we tried to support that request during COVID-19 and G7 meetings. We need to play a role in protecting the space for civil society so that they can play their critical role."

– Ali Hendy, the United Kingdom

Three years ago, Zonta International began to support the Global Programme. Sharon Langenbeck explained how they wanted Zonta clubs to take up the issue of child marriage at the national and local levels, and it is happening now. The Global Programme aligns with Zonta's focus on education for women and girls.

Mieke Vogels from the Netherlands noted that child marriage is a severe violation of human rights, and human rights values underpin the foreign policy of the Netherlands, as does fighting gender inequality. Poverty is another driver of child marriage, and preventing it will bring growth to communities. When girls continue their education, they can participate meaningfully in the economy and make healthy choices regarding their sexuality and how many children they want to have.

In 2019, Norway launched its first International Strategy to Eliminate Harmful Practices 2019–2023. Norway has committed funds to tackle harmful practices, to support the Global Programme and the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation and for Plan Norway. Hilde Røren mentioned how Norway has a telethon nationally and, this year, the funding is going to Plan Norway for ending child marriage. Norway wants to maintain core funding for organizations that are achieving results. A central focus of their strategy on harmful practices is research – asking the difficult questions is important. Norway supports gender equality and will continue this work.

Ali Hendy from the United Kingdom noted that investments to support girls to attend and remain in school are also investments to prevent child marriage. Education and child marriage have a two-way relationship: education can act as a protective factor, delaying marriage for girls, and child marriage continues to be a key driver of school drop-out. In fact, decisions about marriage timing and schooling are often jointly determined. Child brides are more likely to end their education and complete fewer years than their peers who marry later. They are also more exposed to disproportionate levels of violence, which impacts on their ability to learn while in school. This also means that the school closures triggered by COVID-19 may, in effect, increase vulnerability to discontinue education and promote marriage. Making progress on ending child marriage remains a crucial pillar of the work of the United Kingdom that champions 12 years of education.

SUPPORT FOR YOUTH PERSPECTIVES

Support was expressed for involving youth in meetings, including with donors and policymakers at the national level. An example was shared of how the European Union prioritizes youth perspectives through the creation of a special advisor on youth who approves all work regarding youth partnerships.

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REFLECTING ON WHERE WE ARE: WRAPPING UP THE MEETING

We all have rights and so do children. We need to focus on the protection and fulfilment of girls' rights. Childhood up to 18 years of age should be a time to learn, to grow and to pursue one's dreams, not to be married. Child marriage is a crime. It is a serious form of child abuse and a grave violation against human rights. To deny these rights is to dehumanize them. As Nelson Mandela rightfully said, to deny people their human rights is to challenge their very humanity. It is to deny them their right to dignity, education, health, freedom of thought and a right to choose.

Children look up to us – the adults, parents, guardians, religious and community leaders, teachers, social services, the police and policymakers – to protect and love them. The onus should never be on a child to have to speak up in order to be protected from child marriage. It is our responsibility to do something about this. They need to be and have a right to be safeguarded by us against exploitation, abuse, coercion and neglect. Together, we can and must end this crime. With our collective help, let us let children be children.

We all envision that a safe and equal society lies in the choices and voices of girls. I would like to commend UNFPA and UNICEF who have remained steadfast in their commitment to deploy tangible, practical and ambitious measures to create an enabling environment to achieve this goal through scaled-up prevention programmes and comprehensive, accessible, affordable and quality services. You recognize young girls' zeal, acknowledge their challenges and affirm your presence to translate their aspirations and dreams into transformative results.

– Nadia Abdalla, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Information and Communication Technology, Innovation and Youth Affairs, Republic of Kenya

ANNEX 1

Recommendations on gender-transformative programming

The recommendations are based on Global Programme evaluations, technical notes and the roll-out of the Gender-Transformative Accelerator tool.

1. Evidence and research:
- **Examine the root causes** of gender inequalities and gender roles, norms and power dynamics.
- **Support evidence on 'what works'** in gender-transformative programming that fosters multilevel agency, norms, institutions and policies.

2. Leave no one behind: Reinforce efforts **to reach the most vulnerable** and marginalized adolescent girls and boys and their families by targeting them further and relying on **local partners, stakeholders and networks.**
- Recognize an **intersectional** lens to understand and programme for **most-at-risk and marginalized adolescent girls** and their families, including through multichannel programming by leveraging on digital platforms (e.g., gender digital divide is worsened among those most-at-risk and marginalized).
- **Partner with women-led and youth-led organizations**.
- Identify **the most vulnerable** and marginalized girls and ensure that policies are tailored to their rights and needs.
- Involve local partners and actors to undertake **vulnerability assessments.** Use these as advocacy tools.
- **Reach rural and remote communities** by partnering with local organizations, local networks and local authorities to **mobilize adolescent** girls and boys and parents and to deliver **community-based activities.**

3. Change gender norms and build the agency of girls: Continue to develop **complementary multi-channel approaches** to reach target populations based on country context.
- Programming needs to **build the agency of girls**, their **decision-making, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR),** and **bodily autonomy**, while **engaging boys and men** to support gender equality intentionally and deliberately.
- **Influence broadly-held social and gender norms** that perpetuate and legitimize gender inequalities.
- Adopt a **mix of face-to-face and digital/mass media channels** to reach beneficiaries accompanied by advocacy with **governments to address the digital/ media divide** for women and girls.
- Develop and monitor **quality standards for the design of digital approaches.**
- Ensure that **digital approaches foster two-way communication** and engage the intended audiences.

4. Transform structures and systems: Continue **advocacy and systems-strengthening** with governments to maintain access to essential services for adolescent girls and boys in contexts of heightened vulnerability, including in humanitarian crises.
- **Influence underlying policies** and social structures that perpetuate and legitimize gender inequalities.
- Support systems-strengthening to ensure that education, **sexual and reproductive health** (**SRH) and social welfare services, including helplines, are recognized as 'essential services'** for adolescent girls and that their access is improved.
- Advocate to ensure that essential service provision is related to the **rights of adolescent girls and women** in particular during emergencies.
- Strengthen the **prevention components of SRH services** to prevent unintended and early pregnancy.
- Include **mental health and psychosocial support** in services as well as in life skills packages.

5. Social protection, education attainment, skills building and employment opportunities for girls: Articulate further the Global Programme strategy to **leverage social cash transfers** and other forms of **income generation** opportunities for adolescent girls and their families.
- Address **power imbalances and redistribution of resources** recognizing child marriage is about addressing '**alternative opportunities**', in which access to education, health, skilling and gender-responsive/ gender-transformative social protection, and poverty alleviation approaches are fundamental building blocks.
- **Orient** agencies and government departments involved in social protection and economic empowerment programmes on **the criteria used to identify girls vulnerable to child marriage.**
- Strengthen **advocacy and linkages with these agencies and government departments** involved in social protection programmes, with the support of UNICEF social policy, with a view **to anchor the needs of adolescent girls in the conditionalities of these programmes.**
- Build the technical capacities of Global Programme country teams and implementing partners to **leverage social protection programmes.**

Additional notes on gender-transformative approaches
Phase II of the Global Programme has led to a clear theory of change, results framework, technical guidance and capacity-building on gender-transformative programming. There is now a need for operationalizing, while reviewing the COVID-19 recommendations, bearing in mind the following.

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Take into consideration:
- There is **no parallel 'gender-transformative Global Programme'**, as an afterthought, and we need to strengthen existing programming. Begin by using the **'gender equity continuum'** to track, improve and progress programming.
- Gender-transformative programming requires **long-term investments, context and culturally sensitive** approaches, **anticipating resistance and potential backlash**.
- **Deeper reflection** and **critical analysis** are key strategies for influencing shifts in social and gender norms. For instance, digital approaches need to be combined with face-to-face approaches with **intensity, duration** and **fidelity** in life skills and community mobilization interventions.
- Work at **multiple levels and across sectors** with focus on education, SRH and social protection services, while recognizing that **internal gender biases** need to be addressed among service providers.

→

Support enablers:
- **Upskill staff and partners** – at minimum, undertake gender analysis in design and implementation of programmes and promote value clarification to avoid internal gender biases.
- Ensure **resources** are available to build capacity, support progress or intermediate measures and evidence on 'what works' in gender-transformative programming that fosters multilevel agency, norms, institutions and policies.
- **Work with partners** for scale and support civil society organizations (CSOs) with feminist approaches.

ANNEX 2

Reflections on the virtuality of the biennial meeting

Owing to COVID-19 restrictions, the biennial meeting was held virtually. The following table highlights some of the benefits of an online meeting.

Items	Online meeting
Reach and access	The meeting was open to the public and had broad participation beyond the Global Programme, including people who would not have participated in an in-person event due to the travel time and resources required.
Speakers	The meeting allowed for a broader range of international speakers, including donors, than previous in person events.
Cost	The meeting was free to attend for anyone with a computer or phone and a stable internet connection. The cost of the meeting was covered by UNFPA and UNICEF Headquarters.
Technology	A technology expert led the interface with the technology company providing an integrated web platform.
Preparation and planning	The meeting required very detailed planning, more so than an in-person meeting, to ensure the best use of time. Extensive coordination was also required to ensure all speakers and moderators were comfortable with the technology.
Time	The meeting was held over 3 days, 4 hours each day, in either 45-minute or 1-hour sessions, with 15-minute breaks in between. The meeting required tight time keeping, but it kept the sessions focused while allowing for questions from and discussion with participants.
Participation	Active participation by attendees was encouraged through the use of rapid Mentimeter exercises, the Zoom chat function and multiple break-out groups for discussion between participants.
Accessibility of information	The Filo web platform where the meeting was housed had easily accessible links to information related to each session, including reference materials.

UNFPA-UNICEF
GLOBAL PROGRAMME
TO END CHILD MARRIAGE

BRILLIANT MINDS,
BOLD APPROACHES,
BETTER RESULTS

BIENNIAL
MEETING FOR
THE MIDTERM
REVIEW
OF PHASE II