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# UNFPA-UNICEF GLOBAL PROGRAMME TO ACCELERATE ACTION TO END CHILD MARRIAGE

## Phase I Evaluation Summary





# KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Photo: © UNICEF/UN0276237/Boro

The foundation and rationale of the [Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage \(GPECM\)](#) are built on a widespread acknowledgment that child marriage impinges on children's rights and welfare.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) have both played a key role in maintaining forward momentum to end child marriage through positioning the global, regional and national agenda, national policy and legislative support, as well as by demonstrating innovative community action.

- The programme is on track to achieve programme outputs, with aggregate tracking showing signs that the programme is extending its reach and accelerating its approach for most outputs. The programme has surpassed its targets, reaching millions of people in the 12 programme countries with interventions designed to end child marriage.
- The programme has increased and collectively met targets for girls' access to health and protection services over each year of the programme.
- The programme has fostered sustainability through advocacy, institutionalization, strengthening national and subnational systems, developing capacities and mobilizing complementary funding.
- The programme played a unique role in bringing together the combined capabilities of UNFPA and UNICEF to facilitate a multi-sectoral approach that is needed to handle the complex set of inter-related issues that enable child marriage.
- Early lessons suggest that boys must be targeted as beneficiaries and as agents of change to maximize impact; more efforts are needed to reach the most vulnerable populations; and, importantly, better and timely data generation and knowledge management are needed to inform future programming.



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# THE CONTEXT

The purpose of the evaluation was to assess the progress towards results, sustainability of interventions, and programme efficiency and effectiveness to support the design of the second phase of the programme by learning early lessons in joint programme management and implementation.

Child marriage is defined as a marriage in which one or both spouses are under the age of 18. While child marriage is a global phenomenon, it is driven by a complex mix of local factors including social values and norms, cultural and religious beliefs and practices, along with economic, political and community influences.

Child marriage is a serious human rights violation that deprives girls (and boys) of their rights to health, safety and education. The impact of child marriage on children is significant and far-reaching. Child brides often have limited economic opportunities and are less likely to remain in school. They are at elevated risk for domestic violence and face special challenges to

negotiate safer sexual practices, make informed choices and access equal opportunities. In addition, child brides are more likely to become pregnant before their bodies are physically mature, increasing the risk of pregnancy-related complications and maternal and newborn mortality and morbidity.

The Member States of the United Nations have passed a series of resolutions over the past five years that further emphasize the threat that child marriage poses to the universal attainment of human rights. Furthermore, the Sustainable Development Goals include a global commitment to end child marriage by 2030.



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# THE GPECM

This paper summarizes the good practices, progress and key lessons learned through the joint evaluation of the GPECM. The programme is jointly managed and implemented by UNFPA and UNICEF with UNICEF as the lead agency.

Ending child marriage is a key priority in the strategic plans of UNFPA and UNICEF. The GPECM was built to capture the complementarity of the work of each agency towards eradicating child marriage.

The programme is implemented in 12 countries and 4 regions using a range of strategies and working with multiple partners at the national, regional and global levels.

The strategic objective of the GPECM is to accelerate action to address child marriage by enhancing investments in and support for unmarried and married girls and by making visible the corresponding benefits; by engaging key actors, including young people as agents of change in catalysing shifts towards positive gender norms; by increasing political support, resources, positive policies and frameworks; and by improving the data and evidence base.

# INSIGHTS FROM THE FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

## RELEVANCE

Over the last three years, the GPECM has responded to the growing momentum around the importance of ending child marriage and occupies a very important space within the global movement to end child marriage.

The programme is welcomed by stakeholders at all levels, and valued for its unique contributions to normative frameworks and multi-sectoral collaboration.

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## GENDER RESPONSIVE

The GPECM takes a gender-targeted approach, focusing on adolescent girls. Stakeholders generally saw the active engagement of men and boys as a strategic priority to shift harmful patriarchal norms that underpin child marriage practices, but involvement of adolescent boys has not been systematic and should be incorporated more holistically into future programming.

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## VULNERABLE GROUPS

Reaching the most vulnerable groups is key for the GPECM from both a human rights perspective as well as an efficiency perspective due to the linkages between vulnerabilities and child marriage. Despite efforts to reach the most vulnerable, in many instances, interventions have not yet reached the most remote areas. This is therefore an issue to be considered in programme design at the national level.

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## MONITORING CHANGE

As the GPECM shows signs that it is beginning to scale up, it is critical to consider the interaction between different programme outcomes to ensure that rising demands are met with opportunities and services of sufficient quality. The programme has begun tracking higher-level indicators, but data availability and reliability across countries, especially for qualitative measurements, remain issues that will require continued focus as the programme moves forward.

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## PROGRESS IN REACHING GIRLS AND COMMUNITIES

The GPECM has been well designed to foster change processes and is on track to achieve programme outputs. Three areas of progress at the level of beneficiaries and community include:

- The programme reached nearly 5.5 million girls by mid-2018, far exceeding the objective to reach 2.5 million girls by the end of 2019.
- The programme has expanded community outreach significantly and shows signs of scaling up, reaching approximately 11.5 million individuals with information related to ending child marriage in the first half of 2018 (many more than in 2016 and 2017 combined).
- The programme has increased targets for girls’ access to health and protection services over each year of its existence, and has collectively exceeded targets each year. Mid-term 2018 data show collective delivery rates over six times the target, suggesting that the programme is moving towards accelerating interventions. The programme was able to scale up its activities around girls’ education in 2018, assisting over 8,000 schools to improve the quality of girls’ education in the first six months of the year.

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## NORMATIVE SUPPORT

UNFPA and UNICEF have worked collaboratively at the highest levels to support governments to develop national and subnational action plans to end child marriage and support coordination mechanisms. This is a role for which UNFPA and UNICEF are uniquely positioned, and they are integral to ensuring that momentum towards ending child marriage continues. Nine countries have developed action plans, five of which have allocated government resources to plans. Advocacy for greater government investment, evaluation of costing strategies, and tracking of budget allocations and outcomes is required over the next years of the GPECM to foster sustainability and support operationalization of policies/plans. UNFPA and UNICEF should also continue to focus on strengthening legal and legislative frameworks to support adolescent rights during the next phase.

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## LEARNING AND EVIDENCE BASE FOR SCALING UP

## JOINT PROGRAMMING

The GPECM's investments in research and data have contributed to building a stronger evidence base on ending child marriage, but to date, tracking has not offered an indication on the quality and usability of the data generated. Programme-supported interventions show promise for providing scalable models, and some are already being replicated, but country offices are still working on fine-tuning and providing evidence on the impact of interventions. Insufficient efforts have been put into the measuring and documenting of results and translating experiences into costed packages that may be taken to scale.

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Given the complexity of the issues surrounding child marriage, a multi-sectoral approach is seen as a more effective and efficient means of reducing girls' vulnerability to child marriage and other harmful practices. The UNFPA-UNICEF joint work through the GPECM has made a significant contribution to enhancing inter-sectoral and complementary collaboration on child marriage at all levels of operation. The first phase of the programme has been a growth period for designing effective management structures; variations in cohesiveness between countries as well as at different levels of operations remain. Joint operationalization at the sub-national level remains a key priority and challenge for the future. The criteria by which convergence is defined for the programme require further definition and guidance in the next phase to ensure a common understanding and rigorous application.

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“MARRIAGE IS A GIRL AND BOY DECISION. BEFORE IT WAS ARRANGED [...] [NOW] GIRLS CAN EXPLAIN [...] THAT THEY WANT TO FINISH THEIR STUDIES AND TO MARRY WHEN THEY CAN STAND ON THEIR FEET.”

Adolescent girl in Nepal speaking to the impact of the Global Programme

## CONCLUSION

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GPECM leadership is seen by all stakeholders as critical to accelerating the end of child marriage. Through its actions over the last three years, the programme has successfully built forward momentum with many lessons learned for the design of the next phase.

The complementarity of the capabilities of UNFPA and UNICEF supports the convergence of a multi-sectoral approach that is vital to tackling the complex issue of child marriage. The evaluation makes eight strategic recommendations that call for: leveraging normative leadership; moving the global framework towards country contextualization; consolidating and strengthening the evidence base and knowledge management; defining and monitoring ‘jointness’, convergence and complementarity; strengthening and contextualizing monitoring and reporting systems; further investing in human resources; strengthening the programme design; and finding funds or structuring the programme according to resource availability.