

ANNEX B - TERMS OF REFERENCE

Consultant to develop Zimbabwe's National Action Plan on Ending Child Marriage

Summary

Title	Consultancy services to support the Ministry of Women Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprises Development (MWACSMED) in the development on a National Action Plan on Ending Child Marriage in Zimbabwe.
Purpose	Support MWACSMED develop a National Action Plan on Ending Child Marriage.
Type of Contract	Institutional
Location	All 10 Provinces
Duration	45 Days
Reporting to	Gender Programme Specialist

Background

Child marriages in Zimbabwe remains a significant human rights and development challenge, disproportionately affecting girls, particularly in rural and marginalized communities. Over 33% of girls are married before 18, making this not just a statistic, but a national emergency demanding urgent action. Despite notable progress in policy and legal reforms, the practice persists due to a complex interplay of socio-economic, cultural, and religious factors.

Poverty, limited access to education, harmful cultural norms, and certain religious practices continue to drive child marriages. Girls are often married off early as a coping mechanism for economic hardship, to preserve family honor, or in response to unintended pregnancies. These practices are further exacerbated by gender inequality, weak enforcement of existing laws, and gaps in awareness at community level.

Child marriage has far-reaching consequences, including curtailed educational opportunities, increased risk of gender-based violence, early and unintended pregnancies, and adverse health outcomes for girls and their children. It also undermines national development efforts by limiting the potential of a significant proportion of the population.

The Government of Zimbabwe, in collaboration with development partners and civil society organizations, has undertaken various initiatives to address child marriage, including the development of the National Action Plan and communication Strategy on Ending Child Marriages (NAP). The NAP was designed to operationalize national child protection laws enshrined in the Constitution and other policies that respond to child marriage prevention and protection through national, provincial, and district level interventions. It has guided national efforts to prevent child marriages and mitigate their effects.

However, persistent gaps in coordination, implementation, and monitoring highlight the need for strengthened, evidence-based interventions. It is within this context that this consultancy seeks to support ongoing national efforts by providing technical expertise towards the development of a new National Action Plan that will align with current social and economic developments that have a bearing on child marriages as well as changes in the legal framework, which also influence response efforts towards child marriages. The new NAP will ensure that efforts to address child marriages remain responsive to the current needs of children.

Justification

While the previous NAP provided an important framework for coordinated action, emerging evidence points to ongoing gaps in coordination, implementation, monitoring, accountability, financing, and data management. Furthermore, the social, economic, policy, and legal landscape has evolved since the development of the previous plan, necessitating the formulation of a new strategic framework that reflects current realities, priorities, and lessons learned from implementation.

The development of a new National Action Plan therefore requires specialized technical expertise to undertake a comprehensive situational analysis, assess progress and gaps from previous interventions, facilitate broad-based stakeholder consultations, and develop a costed-results oriented, and evidence-based framework. The complexity and multi-sectoral nature of child marriage demand a consultant with expertise in policy development, gender equality, child protection, strategic planning, results-based management, and stakeholder engagement to ensure that the process meets national and international standards.

In addition, the consultancy will help ensure meaningful participation of key stakeholders, including government institutions, civil society organizations, development partners, traditional and religious leaders, communities, and adolescents. Such participation is critical to building national ownership, strengthening accountability, and ensuring that the resulting Action Plan is responsive to the realities and needs of those most affected by child marriage.

The consultancy is also justified by the need to establish a clear Theory of Change, strategic priorities, implementation arrangements, financing mechanisms, and a robust monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL) framework that will guide coordinated action over the 2026-2031 period. The resulting National Action Plan will serve as Zimbabwe's roadmap for accelerating progress towards ending child marriage and achieving national, regional, and global commitments, including the Sustainable Development Goals, Agenda 2063, and other child rights and gender equality frameworks.

Accordingly, the engagement of a qualified consultancy firm is necessary to provide the technical leadership required to develop a high-quality, inclusive, evidence-driven, and implementable National Action Plan that effectively addresses the root causes of child marriage and contributes to the protection, empowerment, and well-being of children and adolescents in Zimbabwe.

Objectives

The broad objective of the exercise is to develop the National Action Plan on Ending Child Marriage.

3.1. The specific objectives are to;

1. To undertake a situational analysis of child marriage in Zimbabwe, including prevalence, drivers, trends, and geographic hotspots, to inform the design of the NAP.
2. To align the NAP with existing national policies, legal frameworks, and international and regional commitments on gender equality, child protection, and human rights.
3. To define clear strategic priorities, outcomes, and interventions that address prevention, protection, and response to child marriage.
4. To develop a results-based framework with measurable indicators, baselines, and targets to guide implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.
5. To design a coordinated institutional and governance framework that clarifies roles and responsibilities of Government, civil society, development partners, and communities.
6. To integrate cross-cutting issues such as gender equality, disability inclusion, adolescent empowerment, and community engagement into the NAP.
7. To develop a costed implementation plan, including resource mobilization strategies and sustainable financing mechanisms.
8. To establish a robust monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning (MEAL) framework, including data collection, reporting systems, and feedback mechanisms.
9. To ensure meaningful participation of key stakeholders, including children and young people, traditional and religious leaders, and community structures, in the development process.
10. To incorporate risk analysis and mitigation strategies to address potential barriers to implementation, including socio-cultural resistance and resource constraints.

Scope of the assignment

The selected consultancy firm will be responsible for the development of a comprehensive National Action Plan on Ending Child Marriages over a period of 45 days. The consultant will work closely with the National Technical Working Group (TWG) on ending Child Marriages, sharing progress updates and engaging in matters where the TWG may assist or may need clarification.

The major tasks involved are the following:

1. Literature Review: Undertake an extensive review of national and international literature on child marriages, in order to identify key factors fuelling child marriages.
2. Research Design: Develop an appropriate methodology to collect qualitative and quantitative data to effectively achieve the stated objectives. The consultant should design and validate data collection tools.

3. Data Collection and Analysis: Engage with various partners from government, Civil Society, UN agencies and communities to collect data that will inform the development of the Action Plan.
4. Final Report: The consultant is expected to develop a document with strategic direction for implementing programmes to end child marriages in Zimbabwe. The document will go through a validation process and be adopted by the Technical Working Group.

Methodology:

The consultancy firm will adopt a participatory, evidence-based and mixed-methods approach to develop the National Action Plan on Ending Child Marriage (2026-2031). The methodology will combine a comprehensive desk review, stakeholder consultations, analysis of existing evidence, and validation processes to ensure that the NAP is technically sound, nationally owned, implementable, and responsive to emerging trends and challenges. The assignment will be implemented through five interrelated phases.

Phase 1: Inception and Planning

The firm will undertake an inception process to establish a common understanding of the assignment and refine the approach in consultation with MWACSMED and the Steering Committee on Ending Child Marriage.

Key activities will include:

- Development of a detailed workplan and consultation schedule
- Preparation of an inception report outlining the methodology, data collection tools, stakeholder engagement plan, quality assurance measures, and risk mitigation strategies.
- Initial briefing meeting with the technical working group on ECM
- Stakeholder Mapping and analysis

Phase 2: Desk Review and Situational Analysis

The consultancy firm will conduct a comprehensive review of existing literature, policies, legal frameworks, research studies, evaluation reports, and administrative data related to child marriage in Zimbabwe.

The review will include:

- Assessment of the status and prevalence of child marriage. Analysis of trends, drivers, and emerging issues
- Mapping of geographical hotspots.
- Review of findings from the NAP 2018-2021 recent evaluation
- Analysis of policy, legislative, institutional and programme gaps
- Review of the best regional and global practices and evidence-based interventions
- Sources of information may include Zimbabwe Demographic and Health Surveys (ZDHS), MICS and census data, National policies and legislation, reports from Government, UN agencies, CSOs and development partners, academic and operational research.

Phase 3: Stakeholder Consultation

To ensure ownership and inclusivity, the consulting firm will undertake consultations with key stakeholders at national and subnational levels.

Key stakeholder Groups to include, Government institutions, civil society and development partners, community stakeholders, adolescents, and child marriage survivors. The firm may use a combination of Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), Provincial consultation meetings, thematic technical working sessions, online surveys (where applicable). All consultations involving children and adolescents will adhere to safeguarding, ethical, and child protection standards.

Phase 4: Development of the National Action Plan

Drawing on findings from the situation analysis and consultations, the consultant will prepare the draft National Action Plan which should include a clear theory of change illustrating pathways for preventing and responding to child marriage, strategic framework, costing and financing framework and results framework.

Phase 5: Validation and Finalization

The consultancy firm will facilitate a participatory validation process to ensure stakeholder ownership and technical quality. Key activities will include:

- Presentation of the draft NAP to the TWG
- National validation workshop
- Collection and documentation of stakeholder feedback
- Revision of the draft NAP based on comments received
- Submission of the final NAP and associated implementation tools.

Expected Deliverables

- a) An inception report containing a detailed roadmap/work plan outlining the roles and responsibilities of the consultancy team with timelines for the entire duration.
- b) Consolidated Inception Meeting with the Technical Working Group to present the inception report and workplan with MWACSMED
- c) A comprehensive initial draft National Action Plan (strategic pillars, results framework and costing) that will be tabled for validation by the stakeholders (15 days)
- d) A final National Action Plan with clear actionable evidence-based key priorities validated by the National Technical Working Group.

Quality Assurance and Ethical Considerations

Throughout the assignment, the consultant will ensure:

- Participation and inclusion of diverse stakeholders
- Gender-responsive and child-centered approaches
- Disability inclusion
- Adherence to safeguarding standards
- Confidentiality and data protection
- Evidence-based decision making
- Alignment with national, regional and international commitments on children's rights, gender equality and the elimination of child marriage.

Payment Terms

All terms and conditions will be reflected in the contract to be signed by UNICEF, and the independent firm. Payment will be made against the submission of deliverables and according to the payment schedule below.

No	Deliverable	Timeline	Budget
Development of a National Action Plan on Ending Child Marriages			
1	Inception Report which includes narrative methodology, Work plan including schedule, roles and responsibilities for the consultancy team.	9 October 2026	5% of consultancy fees
2	Inception Meeting with the Technical Working Group to outline the National Action Plan.	14 October 2026	15% of consultancy fees
3	Draft National Action Plan (strategic pillars, results framework and costing)	30 October 2026	30% of consultancy fees
4	Validation Workshop of the draft NAP with Technical Working Group	6 November 2026	20% of the consultancy fees
5	A final National Action Plan with clear actionable evidence-based key priorities and implementation and accountabilities framework.	13 November 2026	30% of consultancy fees
	Total		100%

Reporting

The contract will end on 13 November 2026, subject to satisfactory performance of set deliverables. Specific details on the timelines are indicated in the tables above.

Evaluation Criteria

Technical Proposal	Points
1. OVERALL RESPONSE • Understanding of UNICEF's needs and responsiveness to the requirements. • Understanding of scope, objectives, and completeness of response. • Overall concord between RFP requirements and proposal.	5
2. STRATEGY, METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH • Quality of proposed approach/ methodology. • Quality of proposed implementation plan, i.e. how the bidder will undertake each task and maintenance of project schedules. • Recognition of direct risks/peripheral issues and methods to prevent and manage risks/peripheral issues.	25
3. PROPOSED TEAM AND PROFESSIONAL ORIENTATION • Structure of Management Team. • Team leader: relevant experience, qualifications, and position with bidder. • Team members: relevant experience of similar scope and complexity qualifications. • Professional expertise and knowledge. • Quality of local partner(s) included as sub-contractor(s), if applicable.	25
4. Evidence-supported TECHNICAL CAPACITY and ORGANIZATIONAL EXPERIENCE • Range and depth of experience with similar projects, contracts, and clients. • Financial status of Institution. • Evidence of similar assignments undertaken in the region, Africa and elsewhere. Availability of PSEA policy and PSEA Certified members • Duty of care for prevention against infectious diseases. NOTE: Institutions that fail to submit relevant documentation that enable a thorough review of the Institution in all relevant areas, do so at their own risk and will be subject to disqualification or penalty of reduced points. The assessment of the Institution will be made based on documents submitted for review in the Proposal.	15
Total technical marks	70

Financial Proposal	
5. FINANCIAL Assessment/review will include: • Overall, price. • Cost benefit comparison related to number and quality of personnel in the Proposal who will develop the NAP but also the profile of the lead consultant for drafting the NAP. • Completeness of the Financial Proposal (ensure that all costs, including professional fees, costs of travel, salaries, insurance, etc. are included in the price offered). • Payment terms/schedule of payment proposed. • Period of validity of the proposal. • Timeline proposed. NOTE: As the most attractive offers will be at an advantage, if the Institution can offer any discounts or options, they should be clearly marked in the financial proposal to facilitate the comparison.	30
TOTAL MARKS	100

Weighted scoring Evaluation approach:

The total amount of points allocated for the financial proposal is [30]. The maximum number of points will be allotted to the lowest financial proposal that meets or exceeds the minimum required technical score of (49 out of 70 points) All other financial proposals will receive points in inverse proportion to the lowest financial, e.g.:

Score for Financial proposal X = (Max. score for financial proposal [30] Points) * (Price of lowest priced proposal) / (Financial proposal X)

Technical and financial proposals will be evaluated separately. Each proposal will be assessed first on its technical merits and subsequently on its financial proposal. The proposal obtaining the highest score overall after adding the technical and financial proposals scores may be recommended for the award of the contract.

During this review, UNICEF may request that clarifications be provided as part of the technical evaluation.

The Bidder(s) achieving the highest combined technical and financial proposal score will (subject to any negotiations and the various other rights of UNICEF detailed in this TOR) be awarded the contract,

NB: Travelling time is approximate because it depends on the nature of the roads and distance

Expected Background and Experience

This is an institutional consultancy.

Institutions not based in Zimbabwe must partner with a local institution.

We are looking for an institution or team of consultants with the ability to lead the entire development of the Action Plan on Ending Child Marriage. The team must have the following:

Required

- Knowledge of Gender-Based Violence (GBV), especially within the Zimbabwean context.
- Knowledge of Zimbabwe's legal framework relating to children.
- Proven knowledge and experience in research and analysis, including in analyzing and synthesizing quantitative and qualitative data.
- Excellent writing, research and analytical skills.
- Experience in preparing and presenting clear and concise oral and written communication.
- Good knowledge of gender and Child Protection partners in-country
- Experience conducting similar assignments at national level will be an advantage
- Fluency in spoken and written English and local languages
- Experience in working with the UN or similar agencies

Other Considerations

- The number and profile of the consulting team members will be proposed by the proposers in order that the team size, experience, qualifications, references, mix and complementarity of expertise, availability and level of effort is convincing that the proposed objectives of the consultancy can be met.
- The number of people and the level of effort of the respective senior, intermediate level and junior experts should be appropriate and ensure a high quality and timely process.
- A strong commitment to delivering timely and high-quality results--i.e. evidence of similar work is highly desirable.

Supervision and Reporting

- The selected institution will work under the strategic guidance of the Gender Specialist in collaboration with the Technical Working Group on Ending Child Marriages providing oversight into the assignment
- the Ministry of Women Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprises Development focal persons will provide support to the assignment.
- The institution will be responsible for all their travel arrangements and costs as well as provision of computers and associated work equipment and space.
- All deliverables will have to be approved by UNICEF and MWACSMED for payment.
 - UNICEF reserves the right to withhold payment if the deliverables do not meet its requirement.

Management and Quality Assurance

- The independent firm will be responsible for ensuring that the consultancy is undertaken as described in these terms of reference and in their proposal. The consulting team leader, more specifically, will oversee the following:
- Oversight and management of team members.
- Managing communications with UNICEF and the Consulting team
- Ensuring adequate workspace, work equipment, accommodation, travel, food, security and insurance arrangement to all consultant members and other relevant service providers.

- Meeting deadlines and ensuring the quality of all products and deliverables,
- Leading the authorship of all reports
- Designing of workshops and training
- UNICEF will manage the contract with the selected verification agency as follows:
 - i).Manage all contractual aspects with the consultant
 - ii).Provide and facilitate introductions to the Ministry of Women, Community, Small and Medium
 - iii).Enterprises Development
 - iv).Approving submitted work for payment upon verification that the work meets the Terms of Reference (ToR) and is of satisfactory quality

General Conditions: Procedures and Logistics

Policy both parties should be aware of:

- No contract may commence unless the contract is signed by both UNICEF and the Contractor.
- No member of the contracting company may travel prior to contract agreement and signature.
- Members of the contracting company will not have supervisory responsibilities or authority on UNICEF budget.

The assignment involves frequent trips within Zimbabwe to cover assessments, monitoring of rehabilitation works, etc. The consulting institution should cover all costs related to travel, transportation and accommodation/ Daily Subsistence Allowances (DSA) in its financial proposal.