

CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT IN THE UNFPA-UNICEF GLOBAL PROGRAMME TO END CHILD MARRIAGE

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BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The purpose of this fact sheet is:

- 1 To present the Global Programme's understanding of and approaches to working with civil society
- 2 To promote a common understanding of key concepts and providing guidance on civil society engagement

The Global Programme to End Child Marriage ('the Global Programme') aims to have a catalytic effect and works with many partners to advocate for and support practical actions to end child marriage, and promote gender equality and the rights of adolescent girls. Partners include civil society organizations (CSOs), governments, other United Nations (UN) agencies, academia and the private sector, as well as girls and boys, women and men. The Global Programme contributes to the Decade of Action and to mobilizing broad partnerships to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.¹

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DEFINING CONCEPTS AND APPROACHES

What are CSOs?²

CSOs are independent of the public and for-profit sectors and designed to advance collective interests. The Global Programme works with the following types of CSOs: international and national non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, social movements, faith-based organizations, women's groups, youth-led organizations, professional voluntary associations, foundations, and social networks.

Roles of CSOs³

The functions of CSOs include: advocacy, monitoring government accountability, elevating the voices of affected populations, programme implementation, research and analysis, and technical assistance.

Benefits of engaging civil society⁴

The benefits of engaging CSOs are:

- Grounding action at local level
- Stronger advocacy for children's rights and gender equality
- Social transformation potential
- Greater effectiveness of aid
- Potential for innovation for children and adolescents
- Strengthened knowledge base
- Additional resources for children and adolescents

HOW TO ENGAGE CIVIL SOCIETY

Guiding principles for partnerships with civil society:⁵

- Mutual focus on delivering results for children and women, especially the most disadvantaged
- Mutual commitment to the core values of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), and to the principles of transparency, accountability and sound financial management
- Equity and equality among all partners
- Integrity and independence of partners
- Cost-effectiveness of the partnership
- Use of forms of cooperation appropriate to the context and the goals
- Transparency in all decision-making processes that affect the partnership
- Responsibility to fulfil all obligations and commitments to the partnership
- Complementarity among partners
- Capacity development of national partners

EXAMPLES OF CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT⁶

1. Working in global coalitions and networks

The Global Programme is a member of a global coalition of CSOs, governments of countries with high rates of child marriage, donors and UN agencies. The coalition supports coordinated efforts to end child marriage by advocating for resolutions at the UN General Assembly and the Human Rights Council, as well as reviewing and reaffirming international mechanisms such as the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action, and the Beijing Programme.

2. Cooperating with CSOs in regional advocacy and actions

Together with CSOs, the Global Programme uses convening power and access to decision makers of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to engage in regional mechanisms related to adolescent girls, child marriage and adolescent pregnancy. The inclusion of CSOs in these mechanisms strengthens government accountability and is essential to their success.

Example: The Global Programme supported the first East and Southern African symposium on menstrual health management in Johannesburg, South Africa. Organized by South Africa's Department of Women in the Presidency and UNFPA, in partnership with UNICEF, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), the World Health Organization (WHO) and regional CSOs, the symposium reinforced the commitment of key stakeholders to work together to strengthen advocacy for policy making, support the evidence base, and scale up innovative and sustainable models to empower and better respond to the menstrual health management needs of girls and women in Africa.

3. Collaborating with national coalitions and networks of CSOs to increase the impact of collective advocacy and actions at national and community level

At country level, the Global Programme supports coalitions and networks of CSOs to coordinate their actions and collaborate on campaigns to end child marriage. Engagements with social movements are particularly important, including by women's organizations, youth-led organizations, child rights organizations and faith-based organizations.

Examples: In Zambia, the Global Programme collaborated with the CSO Coalition on Ending Child Marriage to develop and launch the National Strategy to End Child Marriage – a costed national plan of action with a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework – and the National Advocacy and Communication Strategy on Ending Child Marriage.

In Sierra Leone, the Global Programme collaborates with the Inter-Religious Council, an umbrella organization of Muslim and Christian groups. Together they engage community-level religious leaders to raise awareness and influence harmful practices and gender norms in families and communities. In 2018, 500 religious leaders made a symbolic pledge not to solemnize the marriage of minors.⁷

4. Amplifying the voices of adolescent girls and boys

The Global Programme amplifies the voices of adolescent girls and boys through media partnerships and ensures that they are heard by decision makers.

Example: In Sierra Leone, the Global Programme engaged 28,447 adolescents aged 15–19 as 'U-Reporters' in 2018 to use the social messaging platform U-Report to undertake polling on issues concerning young people at least four times throughout the year. Similarly, the Global Programme encourages peer support to give adolescents the confidence to speak up about sensitive issues such as sexual and reproductive health.

I can voice my worries without being afraid or shy. When someone is trying to get me to do bad things, I boldly tell the person I am not interested. I can discuss sexual and reproductive health with my peers without being shy.

- YOUNG GIRL, Ngyeresi, Gomoa West District, Central Region, Ghana.

5. Reaching those left behind

In 2019, the Global Programme worked with 93 CSOs as implementing partners to reach marginalized girls, families and communities. Many of these CSOs are members of coalitions such as Girls Not Brides.

Example: In Uganda, BRAC, an international development organization, is implementing Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents clubs, providing some of the poorest adolescent girls with age-appropriate, culturally sensitive information and life skills to make safe and healthy life choices.

6. Taking coordinated actions for better programme results

Collaboration and coordination with CSOs contributes to greater coherence, effectiveness, complementarity and efficiency of programmes and research, and reduces duplication.

Example: In Ghana, the Global Programme partnered with four CSOs to provide complementary services for adolescent girls: livelihood skills, adolescent sexual and reproductive health training by the Society for Women and AIDS in Africa, and legal literacy training by the International Federation of Women Lawyers (Ghana chapter). The Planned Parenthood Association of Ghana coordinated the training of teachers, social workers, health workers and traditional leaders to run regular meetings, and Stratcomm Africa carried out consultations with key community stakeholders to identify alternative solutions to prevent child marriage.

7. Sharing technical support, learning and knowledge

The Global Programme both benefits from and builds the technical capacity of CSOs and supports the exchange of best practices and lessons learned.

Example: In Bangladesh, the Global Programme is working with a wide range of stakeholders and 170 experts to develop a standardized adolescent empowerment package that will be rolled out nationwide, including in 2,100 adolescent clubs, that is projected to reach 500,000 adolescents by 2021.

8. Acting as sounding boards to the Global Programme

A number of CSO representatives are members of the Global Programme's formal governance structure in the form of the partners advisory group. This is the technical counterpart to the steering committee of the programme. The members of this group provide strategic and programmatic advice and feedback to the Global Programme.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- UNFPA, 'Partnering with civil society', <<https://www.unfpa.org/partnering-civil-society>>.
- UNICEF, 'Partnering with Religious Communities for Children', UNICEF, New York, 2012, <[https://www.unicef.org/about/partnerships/files/Partnering_with_Religious_Communities_for_Children_\(UNICEF\).pdf](https://www.unicef.org/about/partnerships/files/Partnering_with_Religious_Communities_for_Children_(UNICEF).pdf)>.

ENDNOTES

- 1 United Nations, 'Decade of Action', <<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/decade-of-action>>.
- 2 UNICEF, 'Civil society and UNICEF', <https://www.unicef.org/about/index_3374.html>.
- 3 Global Financing Facility and World Bank, 'Civil society engagement strategy', July 2017, <https://www.who.int/pmnch/media/events/2017/gff_cso_engagement.pdf?ua=1>.
- 4 UNICEF, 'Benefits of partnership between UNICEF and civil society organizations', <https://www.unicef.org/about/partnerships/index_60082.html>.
- 5 UNICEF, 'Civil Society Guide to Working with UNICEF', UNICEF, New York, 2012, <https://www.unicef.org/about/partnerships/files/civil_society_guide_LoRes.pdf>.
- 6 Girls Not Brides, 'Partnering for Success: A step-by-step guide to addressing your most common partnership challenges', Girls Not Brides, London, 2019, <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/National-Partnership-Toolkit_FINAL.pdf>.
- 7 UNICEF's approach to partnering with religious communities: UNICEF, 'Partnering with religious communities', <https://www.unicef.org/about/partnerships/index_60057.html>.