

# ASSESSMENT OF STRATEGIES AND APPROACHES TO ADDRESS CHILD MARRIAGE IN GHANA

## LEARNING BRIEF

ASSESSMENT REPORT



**CHILD PROTECTION SECTION**  
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This report has been prepared by Claudia Lo Forte, an independent consultant recruited by the Child Protection Section of the Country office to conduct a formative assessment of the strategies and approaches towards ending child marriage supported by UNICEF Ghana over the period 2014-2016.

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## Acronyms

|         |  |
|---------|--|
| BDR     | Births and Deaths Registry                         |
| C4D     | Communications for Development                     |
| CBE     | Complementary Basic Education                      |
| CBO     | Community-based Organization                       |
| CDI     | Centre for Development Initiative                  |
| CHW     | Community Health Worker                            |
| CMU     | Child Marriage Unit                                |
| CNC     | Centre for National Culture                        |
| DCD     | Department of Community Development                |
| DOVVSU  | Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit         |
| FGD     | Focus Group Discussion                             |
| GES     | Ghana Education Service                            |
| GEU     | Girl's Education Unit                              |
| GHS     | Ghana Health Service                               |
| GoG     | Government of Ghana                                |
| KII     | Key Informant Interview                            |
| M&E     | Monitoring and Evaluation                          |
| MICS    | Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey                 |
| MoGCSP  | Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection |
| MoLGRD  | Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development |
| NCCE    | National Commission for Civic Education            |
| NGO     | Non-governmental Organisation                      |
| NORSAAC | Northern Sector Action on Awareness Centre         |
| OOS     | Out of school children                             |
| SfL     | School for Life                                    |
| UNFPA   | United Nations Population Fund                     |
| UNICEF  | United Nations Children's Fund                     |
| YHF     | Youth Harvest Foundation                           |

## 1. Introduction

Child marriage is defined as “a formal marriage or informal union of children before age 18” (UNICEF: n.d.). This includes both a formal marriage celebrated by a religious or traditional authority, and ‘cohabitation’, or when a couple lives in an informal union as if married (UNICEF: 2016 and UNICEF: n.d.). It also considered a violation of human rights and a harmful traditional practice affecting more girls than boys, leading to numerous negative health and education consequences and limiting girls’ economic and individual empowerment (Ibid; UNICEF: 2005). It is estimated that every year 15 million girls are married as children (Girls not Brides, 2017). In response to this situation, combating child marriage has become a core development and human rights issue. Target 5.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aims to ‘Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilations’, making it a global development priority.

In Africa child marriage has become a target priority of the African Union (AU). In 2014 the AU launched a continental campaign to end child marriage, putting the practice on the agenda of many AU member states and especially in West and Central Africa, where most of the countries with the highest prevalence rates of child marriage are located. While the prevalence of child marriage in Ghana has declined over the past three decades, progress has been uneven: 1 in 5 girls aged 20-24 years are married before the age of 18 today, compared to 1 in 3 girls in the early 1990s (UNICEF:2016). UNICEF recognises that the key drivers of child marriage in Ghana are multiple and multifaceted and linked to gender inequality, poverty, social norms and cultural and traditional practices that favour boys’ over girls’ in all facets of life, teenage pregnancy, as well as families’ desires to protect their ‘honour’ by avoiding pregnancy out of wedlock (UNICEF Ghana: 2014).

Between 2014 and early 2017, UNICEF Ghana has invested approximately US\$10m in a portfolio of projects, strategies and approaches to address child marriage across different sectors and regions, supporting both the Ghanaian government and local and international NGOs. These efforts involve activities implemented predominantly under three UNICEF programmes funded by four separate financial streams pooled from three donors, the Dutch Government Fund (2014-2017), the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to Accelerate Action to end Child Marriage, as well as the Canadian Government funding supporting UNICEF’s overall Child Protection Programme in Ghana (2014-2019).

In 2016 UNICEF Child Protection section commissioned a formative assessment of the strategies, approaches and programmes to address child marriage under its different streams of funding. The assessment aimed at:

1. establishing evidence around the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and equity of UNICEF’s investments, identifying lessons learned around successful and less successful approaches tested in different communities;
2. providing recommendations for the wider Child Protection sector in Ghana, particularly in view of supporting the implementation of the new Ghana National Strategic Framework on Ending Child Marriage (2017-2026)
3. informing future direction of overall child marriage programming, both as part of the upcoming UNICEF-Government of Ghana (GoG) Country Programme Cooperation agreement (2018-2022), the Joint UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme, as well as in terms of stimulating a cross-sectoral dialogue on the best ways to address child marriage with agencies and organisations beyond UNICEF’s realm or funding.

This learning brief presents findings of and lessons learned from the assessment of such wide portfolio of initiatives. After briefly describing UNICEF’s Ghana approach to addressing child marriage in section

1, section 2 describes the methodological approach of the assessment and section 3 presents the picture emerging on child marriage from field work. Section 4 provides a series of lessons learned around the various implementation approaches supported by UNICEF, including evidence on efficiency, sustainability and data collection and learning systems. The Conclusions in section 5 provide a review of initial key successes as well as what needs to be improved in the approaches implemented and section 6 offers recommendations going forward for key stakeholders.

### **1.1 UNICEF's approach to child marriage: Theory of Change and initiatives supported**

UNICEF used baseline data drawn from the 2011 Ghana Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey (MICS) and the 2014 Ghana (DHS), the 2014 UNICEF Child Protection Baseline, alongside local studies and global evidence as well as the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme Theory of Change (ToC), to develop a problem tree analysis, intervention logic and Ghana-specific ToC to address the key drivers and causes of child marriage. These include discriminatory social norms, lack of economic opportunities, poor and unequal access to social, educational and health services, adolescent pregnancy and poor implementation of the legal and policy framework. To address these causes, the ToC identified specific protection, education, health, socio-economic and empowerment strategies as well as an improved regulatory framework that would contribute to better individual, family, community and national level outcomes. These in turn would lead, at the intermediate impact level, to shifts in social norms and a stronger political and social environment to address child marriage. Ultimately, the aim is to contribute to an enabling environment in which girls are healthier, safer, better able to choose a life of their own and free from marriage (see Problem tree analysis and ToC in Annexes I and II).

UNICEF then decided to focus the support on areas of interest and mandate, and particularly:

1. social and behaviour change initiatives, including through the use of Communication for Development (C4D) approaches;
2. engagement, empowerment and participation of girls in different settings;
3. strengthening service delivery (especially access to and retention in education, birth registration and child protection);
4. supporting GoG-led national level regulatory efforts and coordination mechanisms, including promoting learning, sharing and data collection across different initiatives.

The initiatives primarily focused on addressing the protection, knowledge, and education needs of adolescent girls around the issue of child marriage. In total, at the time of the assessment (January – May 2017), all the various streams of funding had provided support to 16 specific community-based projects (14 led by NGOs and two by the GoG agencies) and a number of government agencies such as the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP), the Births and Deaths Registry (BDR), the Department of Community Development (DCD) of the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MoLGRD), the National Committee for Civic Education, Ghana Education Services etc. Funding also was provided for the national coordination and information dissemination work of the newly established Child Marriage Unit at the MoGCSP. Initiatives varied in duration, spanning between one to three years, with the majority operating for up to 2 years. A mapping of all initiatives supported showed the below type of interventions<sup>1</sup>:

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<sup>1</sup> NGOs reviewed for the assessment include: ActionAid, Afrikids, ACTWAR, CDA, CDI, IDC, International Needs, NORSAAC, Seek to Save, Youth Harvest (funded by Child Protection Section); Costal TV, Literacy Bridge (funded by C4D Section); Schools for Life and Afram Plain Development Organisation (Funded by Education Section).

| Area   | Initiatives  | Implementers   |
|--|--|--|
| <p>Social and behaviour change initiatives, including through the use of C4D approaches;</p> | <p><b>National level:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of mass and traditional media, community radio networks, edutainment channels (soap operas, cartoons), at continental, national and regional levels (engaging with relevant ministries, African Union campaign to End Child Marriage etc.); use of national and regional-level Ambassadors (famous people acting as champions), social media, mobile phone technology, IEC materials;</li> <li>• Devising a “Social Drive in Ghana” approach and branding to reduce the acceptance of social practices that have negative consequences for the protection of children, including child marriage;</li> </ul> <p><b>Community level:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information provision to families and community elders through theatre, drama, durbars and Talking Books to educate on health, protection and education consequences of child marriage, the Ghanaian law; community reflections, dialogues on child marriage, teen pregnancy and other child protection concerns through the use of the Child Protection community facilitation Toolkit (used for community mobilisation and training of community mobilisers/frontline workers);</li> <li>• Engagement of traditional and religious leaders as agents of change;</li> <li>• Parenting skills: engagement with parents on positive communication with children and promoting the importance of girls’ education;</li> </ul> | <p>MoGCSP<br/>NCCE, CNC<br/>DCD of<br/>MoLGRD<br/>NGOs</p>                       |
| <p>Engagement, empowerment and participation of girls in different settings</p>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mobilisation and sensitisation of youth groups, peer educators, child ambassadors to lead campaigns against child marriage or conduct peer-education activities, including with children at risk (kayaye girls and other working children) and community monitoring of child marriage cases;</li> <li>• Establishment of children’s clubs and girls’ clubs to educate, monitor and report on cases of child marriage in the communities as well as provide information on adolescents’ sexual and reproductive health (ASRH);</li> <li>• Provision of information to girls and boys in schools and out of schools (OOS) on support networks, mentoring, and adolescent SRH (ASRH) with a focus on kayaye and OOS girls;</li> </ul>  | <p>CNC,<br/>NCCE<br/>DCD<br/>NGOs in partnership with GES</p>                    |
| <p>Strengthening service delivery</p>  | <p><b>In collaboration with GES:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing access to child/girl-friendly quality primary education for OOS girls through Complementary Basic Education (CBE) and Non-Formal Education (NFE) in 4 districts to support children 8-14 years old acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills;</li> <li>• Strengthening the implementation of the Guidelines for Education Sector Management and Response to Teen Pregnancy and the Gender in Education Policy to address girls’ needs in the education sector and the reenrolment of pregnant girls after delivery;</li> <li>• Training of district-level Girls Education Officers of GES on gender issues</li> </ul>  | <p>Complementary Basic Education and Girls Education Units at GES, NGOs, BDR</p> |

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
|  | <p><b>Collaboration with BDR to provide:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technical support to officials in 60 districts with lower birth registration (BR) with business practices, accountability, customer services and delivery of awareness raising and information campaigns to promote BR;</li> <li>• Improvement of BR ICT system to facilitate quicker registration of births;</li> <li>• Planned MoU between BDR, Ghana Health Services (GHS) and GES, to conduct advocacy in support of BR in different settings, including health clinics where births take place;</li> <li>• Support to Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) to harmonise different systems as part of pan-African efforts to improve CRVS;</li> </ul> <p><b>Cross-sectoral Interventions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engagement with and capacity strengthening of local governance mechanisms and service providers such as District Assemblies and related Subcommittees, Domestic Violence and Victims’ Support Unit (DOVVSU), the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), Ghana Health Services (GHS) and Ghana Education Services (GES), Department of Social Welfare (DSW) and Department for Community Development (DCD) to prevent and respond to cases of child marriage in collaboration with the informal system, and disseminate information in a more coordinated and effective manner</li> </ul> |   |
| <p>Supporting the GoG-led national level regulatory efforts, coordination mechanisms, including promoting learning, sharing and data collection across different initiatives</p> | <p><b>UNICEF CP programme supported the MoGCSP to play a critical coordinating role for advancing all efforts to end child marriage:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishment of the Child Marriage Unit in the Domestic Violence Secretariat of the MoGCSP and launch of a National Strategic Framework and Action Plan to end child marriage in Ghana aligned with the Child Protection Policy Framework, Gender Policy, and Child Protection Behavioural and Social Change Strategy;</li> <li>• Information-collection, coordination and dissemination through web-based and other platforms for documenting results, lessons learned and improve programming among cross-sectoral stakeholders</li> </ul>   | <p>MoGCSP and particularly the CMU NGOs NCCE District Assemblies (DAs), Department of Children (DoC), DCD</p> |

**2. Methodological approach for the assessment**

**2.1 Assessment methodology and tools**

The methodology for this assessment employed both qualitative and quantitative tools including: a desk review of all 16 government and NGO projects’ documentation and UNICEF’s funding streams and relevant internal documentation; an online survey designed and administered to 16 partners (14 NGO and two GoG partners); two field visits in three regions (Northern, Upper East and Greater Accra) reviewing six UNICEF-funded projects in nine rural and urban communities; semi-structured key informant interviews conducted at the national, regional, district and local levels in person with NGOs, national and local government officials, UN and donor agencies, as well as with key informants in the communities (traditional and religious leaders, service providers such as community health workers, teachers, etc.); FGDs with fathers, mothers or other male and female caregivers and adults who participated in or were aware of the activities of the projects under consideration; FGDs with children,

adolescents and young people (10 to 25 years old) who had participated in project activities both in school and at community level; testimonials with available girls who attended projects activities and were rescued from a child marriage situation.<sup>2</sup> A total number of 226 individuals from communities, NGOs, GOG, UN agencies and the donor community participated as respondents in the assessment.

The assessment consultant adopted participatory approaches when conducting activities with children. In particular, during FGDs children were stimulated through a range of age-appropriate activities to explore issues related to child marriage and to the UNICEF-supported interventions that are taking place in their community. The FGD tool included photo elicitation activities, problem tree analysis and time lines. As time did not allow for the piloting of tools and for the hiring of a national research team but only of translators, the feasibility of these activities was assessed in collaboration with UNICEF but also directly in the field, during the actual FGDs with girls and boys, and adjustments to the tools were made accordingly.

In total, six projects were selected to be reviewed for field work in the Northern Region (NORSAAC, Centre for National Culture), Upper East Region (Youth Harvest Foundation, Afrikids, School for Life) and Greater Accra Region (Centre for Development Initiative). Key criteria for the selection of the project and partners included: coverage of at least three regions, including Greater Accra, rural and urban communities; highest prevalence rates; mix of strategies across projects; balance of projects targeting both girls in school and out of school and girls at risk of child marriage.

## 2.2 Assessment questions

Assessment questions and sub-questions were designed on the basis of the OECD/DAC criteria or relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability with an additional criterion on M&E and learning and incorporating reflections on equity of approaches throughout the other areas. Below is a list of the key higher-level assessment questions.

| DAC Criteria     | Key assessment Questions   |
|------------------|--|
| Relevance        | 1. Are the strategies and activities supported by UNICEF Ghana, including those implemented by CSOs/NGOs partners and the GoG addressing and targeting specific drivers of child marriage and are these relevant to the local context and issues?  |
| Effectiveness    | 2. To what extent are the objectives of the various output-level interventions likely to be achieved / have been already achieved?   |
| Efficiency       | 3. Have the interventions been implemented cost-efficiently? Have objectives been attained so far on time? Is there evidence that implementation could have been more efficient if undertaken in a different manner?   |
| Sustainability   | 4. Are the intended and unintended effects of implementing the interventions likely to continue beyond the provision of UNICEF or other development partners' support? What factors contribute to the sustainability or non-sustainability of the interventions currently being implemented? |
| Equity           | 5. To what extent are the interventions reaching the poorest and most vulnerable children, including, but not limited to, the least visible girls and families? To what extent are the interventions benefitting boys and girls in an equitable way?   |
| M&E and learning | 6. How is evidence collected and collated to create an overall picture of the situation of child marriage in Ghana and the response provided by UNICEF, GOG and partners?  |

<sup>2</sup> The sampling resulted as follow: 48 girls <18yo; 13 boys <18yo; 12 male youth 18-25 yo; 9 female youth 18-25; 56 male adults (including parents and caregivers); 39 female adult caregivers (including parents and caregivers); 12 religious and traditional leaders; 16 service providers; 10 local level GoG officials; 11 national level GoG, NGO, UN and donor officials (MoGCSP, GES, the NCCE, Births and Deaths Registry, Department of Community Development), Staff of ActionAid Ghana, International Needs Ghana, UNICEF Programme Staff, UNFPA and representatives from the Canadian High Commission and the Embassy of the Netherlands.

### 3. Learning from the context: community understanding of childhood, marriage, transition to adulthood and responses to child marriage

This section highlights how community members in areas identified for the formative assessment understood the key drivers of child marriage and what child protection or resolution mechanisms they put in place to address the practice.

#### 3.1 Marriage and family formation as the ultimate steps in the transition to adulthood

In Ghana childhood and the transition to adulthood are marked by body changes and a progressive acquisition of roles and responsibility within the community with age being a secondary feature. Communities do not consider chronological age as crucial to determine adulthood, rather body changes (the onset of menarche and the growth of breasts in girls or the changing of the voice in boys) and the ability to marry or cohabit, bear children, form a family, get a job and sustain it and provide for the needs of children were deemed more important markers of the transition to adulthood. Perceived “readiness for marriage” is understood to be linked to such physical changes as well as the perception that adolescents start manifesting mutual interest towards each other, which is linked to their burgeoning sexuality, and the progressive acquisition of different roles and responsibilities in the community. Once these stages and changes are progressively attained, girls and boys are considered to have become adults and are thus ready to marry. Marriage and forming a family are ultimate steps in the transition to adulthood.

Communities view marriage as a formal union blessed by traditional and/or religious leaders, in which a man asks for the hand of someone’s daughter; sometimes this is done following regular and heavy investment of money and farming support in the girl’s family. Betrothal, elopement and bride kidnapping are also common among certain ethnic groups in the north. However, there are cases in which girls will cohabit without being married especially in situations of pregnancy out of wedlock. The community resolves the issue by pushing couples to cohabit, so as to avoid such socially unacceptable situation. Whilst this is considered a ‘union’, a formal marriage will not always be celebrated in these circumstances

##### 3.1.1 Child marriage is rarely forced

The marriage of girls who are under 18 years of age, including as young as 14-15 years, and are considered or consider themselves ready, can and will take place, especially when they are not in school. In general, DHS data confirm what found during community consultations, whereby girls tend to marry spouses who can be at least 7 years older and at times girls can choose their spouse and in the majority of cases parents will decide in discussion with them. In a minority of cases girls appear to be forced to marry, especially with someone significantly older than them. In general, forced marriage was deemed most common among those living in extreme poverty and marriage with much older men is generally rare.

#### 3.2 The contextual and multi-faceted drivers of child marriage: understanding life trajectories

Life trajectories and choices available to adolescent boys and girls and their families are influenced by numerous factors. These include local understanding of childhood, adulthood and marriage and expectations around the specific roles and responsibilities that adolescent should adopt to benefit their

families and communities and their personal growth. They also include contextual community circumstances, such as migration, the presence of and access to local health and education services, employment opportunities, the existence of community-based social cohesion mechanisms alongside individual families' economic and social circumstances. The assessment found that attending school, engaging in local market or farming activities, migrating or getting married represent the most common and appropriate life trajectories for girls and boys in the communities visited, whereas being idle at home without any schooling or employment is not deemed socially acceptable. These many and interrelated factors are thus interlinked and profoundly affect the availability of life choices for girls (and boys) and, ultimately, options around marriage. During community consultations more specifically, poverty, the risk (or existence) of teenage pregnancy, lack of intergenerational dialogue as well peer pressure and girls' desire to have their own home and husband were particularly thought to lead children to marry.

### ***3.2.1 Marriage as a livelihood and survival strategy***

Across the regions and communities visited, the link between poverty and child marriage manifested itself very clearly and often means that marriage becomes a livelihood and survival strategy. Poverty influences life choices for families and girls, often leaving marriage as the main option to support an entire family. Poverty was raised almost unanimously by communities and parents over and over again both during data collection and in reviewing project monitoring reports and is deemed one of the reasons why children can't go to school, girls become pregnant or why parents choose to marry their daughters off.

Thus, for example, poverty pushes girls (and boys) to leave their homes and migrate to urban centres or to rural farming or mining areas to seek employment opportunities to increase their marriageability prospects or to save money so they can go back to school, or open a little business (e.g. as seen in the 'kayaye' phenomenon). Migration translates into acquired freedom and independence but also lack of support systems and heightened protection risks for girls. This may lead to some girls living and having sex with men or being exposed to sexual exploitation or violence, increasing the risk of getting pregnant and then returning home with a child, a cause of much anxiety for families, who will push for marriage.

Parents' inability to provide for all of their children was also linked to the economic returns of marriage. In communities in the Upper East and Northern Regions, it is common for families to expect for a daughter a dowry of four cows, which will be reinvested in the male children's marriage or simply in feeding and sending to school other siblings, both boys and girls. Thus, with many mouths to feed, the marriage of a girl is seen as a good option to support the entire family. Also, poverty is linked to girls' engaging in transactional sex with boys and men in return for gifts, money or other basic items (such as school notebooks, sanitary pads or sandals) they want or need. The assessment also revealed that parents, and especially mothers, may push their girls to get married, because they will be given gifts and support from their future sons in law. Thus, marriage is used as a livelihood strategy, the benefits of which can extend from the individual girl to her parents and other family members.

### 3.2.2 Teenage pregnancy and understanding of sex and sexuality

The data in Box 1 from the 2014 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) show that premarital sex is common in Ghana and that young women in general initiate sexual intercourse before marriage with men that are seven years older than them.

This assessment revealed that teenage pregnancy (particularly out of wedlock) is deemed a major driver of child marriage by adults and children in all communities visited. Community consultations revealed that parents are preoccupied of situations in which girls appear to exchange sex for food or items or engage with boys during traditional night-long ceremonies, then get pregnant, and parents are ‘forced’ to marry them off in order to preserve the respectability and honour of the family. Exploring only the surface of this linkage between child marriage and teenage pregnancy revealed a complex picture and web of relations, which portrays parents as unable to discuss sexual and reproductive health issues with their adolescent children, control their children sexual activity and adolescent girls being perceived as both overly sexually active as well as being ignorant about sex. How to negotiate it and about their sexual and reproductive health (SRH). Their behaviour is ascribed to their irresponsibility whereas men’s and boys’ sexual conduct is less questioned.

|   | F    | M    |
|---|------|------|
| % respondents age 25-49 who had first intercourse by age 15 | 11%  | 5%   |
| % respondents age 25-49 who had first intercourse by age 18 | 44%  | 27%  |
| % respondents age 25-49 who had first intercourse by age 20 | 68%  | 52%  |
| Respondent age 15-24 who never had sexual intercourse       | 35%  | 53%  |
| Respondents median age at first marriage                    | 20.7 | 26.4 |
| Respondents age 25-49 median age at first intercourse       | 18.4 | 19.8 |

Source: Ghana 2014 DHS

Unmet needs for family planning and contraception is high in Ghana at 42%, decreasing little from previous years (MacQuarrie: 2014). Discussion with young people revealed that they have little access to quality information on sex and sexuality, on family planning and SRH services and rights. Whilst science is taught in school, for example, sexuality education is only partially included in the curriculum and with a focus on abstinence, and whilst some NGOs are trying to fill this gap, parents and teachers express much discontent at something they view as inappropriate topics to be discussed with children.

### 3.2.3 Lack of intergenerational dialogue

Community consultations revealed that adults and children do not engage in intergenerational dialogue and struggle to mutually meet their needs and understand fears. On one side, parents, especially mothers, are deemed responsible for their inability to communicate to their children the basic community values and to advise them on appropriate behaviour and on the importance of education. Parents express that their economic situation prevents them from supporting their children but also argue that they are unable to control them, as they cunningly deceive them, jumping out of compounds at night and spending time with peers completely unsupervised, especially during traditional festivals and celebrations. On the other hand, children mention that parents are unable to meet their basic needs, do not support them in their education efforts and assume that girls will be able to take care of themselves while their mothers fend for the younger siblings. This lack of intergenerational dialogue particularly in the adolescence phase is deemed to be leading children to disrespect parents, for example roaming around unsupervised, including at night, engaging in sex and to girls becoming pregnant out of wedlock.

### 3.2.4 Acquiring social status through marriage

Community consultations revealed that peer emulation, curiosity about sex but also eagerness to acquire an adult status, marked by having a husband and one’s own house, translate into girls in some cases actually expressing their desire to get married or to cohabit with a boy or a man, especially if

they are not in school. The respect acquired through the social status achieved by married girls, the better food and gifts their husbands provide, the respectability of becoming a mother and the gifts and attention that come with it, the presents received by the girl's family, all these factors are considered 'prestigious' and a source of emulation, especially in the face of a lack of alternatives. These are not insignificant considerations in communities where opportunities for alternative life choices, and indeed, for challenging social expectations, are limited.

### **3.2.5 The positive impact of education**

The assessment found that the ability of parents to provide for their daughters' education has significant positive impact on girls' outcomes. Retention in education appears to both delay the age at which marriage takes place and improve the marriage chances for girls in terms of finding better suitors. Thus, if education is an option, parents can afford it and girls perform well, they will be allowed to continue with school thus delaying the age of marriage. Also, education appears to have a knock-on effect on girls: on one side, girls who have attained some level of education seem to be better able to push back on unwanted suitors for longer, although eventually parents will try to convince them to marry someone whom they deem appropriate. Also, educated girls, especially if they marry later than what is considered to be the appropriate time, are thought able to choose 'better' or more educated men and their marriages are considered more successful.

### **3.3 Community responses to child marriage**

As mentioned, formal marriage is an acceptable option for many girls and their families, especially in situation with limited opportunities. However, communities are aware that the interest on the practice of child marriage is raising: whilst they don't necessarily refuse to discuss about it, they at times view it as an interference in internal affairs. Communities in which project addressing child marriage take place, appear to be open to the numerous activities proposed, especially when they entail community consultations and discussions about the topic, generally resolving in the adoption of community resolutions to end the practice.

However, it is rather the fear of teenage pregnancy and the ensuing unacceptable social situation, which concerns parents the most. Fear of pregnancy out of wedlock is a reason for marrying girls as soon as there is a chance that they could be considered sexually attractive to men and/or may themselves start to show an interest in boys. It is one of the primary reasons community leaders are developing "community by-laws" to prevent teenagers from attending traditional night ceremonies, where communities believe many pregnancies occur. Community members explained that in a case of pregnancy out of wedlock, they will first try to resolve the issue through their own systems, by bringing together the family of the girl and 'the culprit' (as described by communities) and favouring a situation of cohabitation until she delivers. If the matter is not resolved, and the man or his family refuse to take care of the pregnant girl, the Chief will further intervene and eventually will call social services. However, this is deemed a last, undesirable resort and generally communities expressed a sense of distrust towards GoG social services' interference in what they see as internal matters.

## **4. Learning and good practice examples**

This section will reflect on the different strategies and approaches adopted by UNICEF and Government/ civil society partners to understand the practice of child marriage and address the needs of communities and girls. It will highlight the different approaches employed, the good practices as well as the gaps that need to be addressed. Finally, it will look at programmatic efficiency and sustainability as well as issues around data collection and M&E systems.

### **4.1 Assessing communities' and girls' needs**

Child marriage has been a central concern of the GoG's child protection efforts and many organisations have actively participated in supporting the government to devise a national campaign and in the

drafting of the National Strategic Framework on Ending Child Marriage (2017-2026). All UNICEF-funded organisations have significant experience in addressing child protection issues on the ground, from violence, abuse and neglect of children, to child labour, street children, adolescent SRH and girls, empowerment, as well as access to quality education and communication for social change. Actors oftentimes collaborate and use existing platforms to engage with children and communities through committees, school clubs, community durbars etc. The work of UNICEF is in line with these efforts and there is clear convergence of objectives and practices between the GoG, NGOs and UNICEF's strategy to address child marriage.

Most organisations have employed different ways to gather information on child marriage, generally they understand the situation and their locality very well as they already operate in some of the targeted communities. However, few have actually conducted in depth needs assessments, baselines or situation analyses to further outline the three, with focus on locally-specific drivers. Whilst theoretically recognising the centrality of the complex, structural drivers of child marriage, the initial focus of UNICEF support in the 2014-2016 period placed a strong emphasis on behavioural and social change approaches. In turn, community-based interventions have focused particularly on challenging social norms through behaviour change communication, mostly focusing on providing information to children and communities about the risks associated with child marriage whilst encouraging them to pursue education and build their future. However, other important drivers, such as addressing the role of poverty, girls' agency and teenage pregnancy, have remained inadequately addressed.

## 4.2 Implementing programme approaches

### 4.2.1 Social and behaviour change to address child marriage and teenage pregnancy

Organisations were found to adopt several approaches to engage communities in reflections and discussions about child marriage and challenge social norms and behaviours that perpetuate the practice. They generally use traditional media such as TV and radio as well as social media campaigns, engage communities and traditional and religious leaders in conversations about the negative consequences of child marriage utilising drama and durbars, including through the use of a Child Protection community facilitation Toolkit. Other times key community stakeholders, traditional and religious leaders (a local Imam or Chief) are mobilised to act as role models against child marriage or teenage pregnancy, such as through community model households or through setting up community level monitoring structures. Generally, as a result of the meetings and durbars, traditional and religious leaders issue declarations in support of adolescent girls' development and pledge their commitment to curbing child marriage and teenage pregnancy through the application of community sanctions.

#### **Box 2: The Child Protection Toolkit**

In collaboration with GoG and NGO partners, UNICEF designed a Child Protection community facilitation Toolkit, a tool for community sensitisation, which includes a Training Manual, a Facilitators' Guide and numerous child and adult-friendly participatory exercises. The Toolkit aims to stimulate open discussion about child protection topics, including child marriage, as well as teenage pregnancy and gender roles and responsibilities. Tools include body and community mappings, games about children rights, exploring dangers and how to protect oneself from them, supporting and nurturing children's development, discussing the division of labour in the household, different gender roles and expectations for boys and girls, etc. As of early 2017, the Toolkit was rolled out in 800 communities in 10 districts in 10 regions. DCD, UNICEF and other agencies trained about 450 GoG and NGO staff members on the use of the Toolkit, which overall received praise from those who used it. The use of the Toolkit is spreading beyond the issue of child marriage, as NGOs are now starting to train their own staff and volunteers on its use as a way to facilitate community conversation, thus helping NGOs breach very difficult conversations in a non-judgmental way.

Sources: Final report on the programme *Reducing Early and Forced Marriage and other forms of Violence, Abuse, Exploitation of Girls in Ghana to the Dutch donor and FGDs with Achievers Ghana Peer Educators and Male Parents*, Sabegu

At the local level, as a result of these sensitisations and the extensive community engagement, some **positive results** are emerging:

- *Increased knowledge acquisition:* children and adults have acquired more knowledge about the health, education and legal consequences of child marriage and, in some cases, where to go to seek redress. Field work showed that boys and girls, adult caregivers and traditional and religious leaders interviewed asserted that they have become more aware of the dangers of child marriage and teenage pregnancy, something which they say they weren't aware of before. Some children, especially those engaging in school clubs, are especially aware of what to do and where to go if they witness a case of or are themselves at risk of child marriage;
- *Triggering attitude change:* community discussions have contributed to bringing communities together to engage in conversation about difficult topics such as teenage pregnancy, sex and sexuality. In some cases, field work showed that community engagement is starting to trigger different attitudes towards, for example, children's education and girls' needs, gender roles and responsibilities within households, etc.
- *Skills building:* some initiatives such as school clubs have contributed to creating new knowledge, skills and social assets for the children involved. This has encouraged girls and boys to find a network of friends whom they can talk to about these topics.

**Gaps to be addressed:** However, while there are numerous positive signs that community members are learning new information and are starting to question certain attitudes in public community events, something that may have been unthinkable before, UNICEF and partners should reflect on the extent to which social and behavioural change strategies alone can be effective in addressing the drivers of child marriage. Thus, for changes in attitudes to trigger changes in behaviour, interventions need to be complemented with a multi-pronged approach that offer people alternative life choices, that address poverty reduction so that incentives for girls' education are provided, that offer services where there aren't any, that support out-of-school children to re-enter school. Ultimately, the fact that some actions have been taken by local actors to prevent children from attending community outings appears to be more a reflection of the fear of teenage pregnancy than of the undesirability of child marriage and may not be an indication of behavioural change towards child marriage as such because many of the other structural drivers of child marriage remain unaddressed.

Whilst it is positive that traditional and religious leaders are engaged and open to discuss and debate these issues, there is currently limited evidence from project implementation that community declarations and sanctions are being effective as the implementation of declarations is effectively not monitored (and it is difficult to monitor). The risk, in fact, is that some sanctions may not be in children's best interest, for example when curbing their mobility and opportunity to meet and engage with each other. Communities taking action in the form of open declarations may in some instances be a reaction to the attention that has accompanied projects rather than to any fundamental behavioural and social change. Also, engagement with communities should ensure that they are not 'pushed' into declarations but that time and space is provided to reflect and act on them.

Also, whilst the engagement with religious and traditional leaders is positive, it would be important that discussions include not only the health and education consequences of child marriage and the appropriate age of marriage according to the Ghanaian law, but also information about girls' overall development outcomes, which leaders appear to be much more receptive of. Ultimately, UNICEF and partners need to further reflect and discuss with communities how to address the crucial incentives that perpetuate child marriage, particularly poverty and teenage pregnancy and provide opportunities to articulate possible alternatives for families, acceptable life choices for girls and demonstrate how these will benefit the entire community.

#### ***4.2.2 Engagement, empowerment and participation of girls in different settings***

Evidence from field work shows that projects engage especially in-school girls and boys with numerous activities such as safe spaces and clubs. They also engage young community members to become ambassadors for change or to monitor and report cases of child marriage in their communities. Activities mostly take place in school, during school hours, or capitalise on existing clubs or associations where young people congregate, as the main entry point for targeting children and adolescents. Generally, children participating in clubs are trained on various topics such as child and girl's rights, child protection, the negative effects of child marriage, the risks of pregnancy and unprotected sex, substance abuse (alcohol, drugs), maintaining an appropriate behaviour when attending traditional ceremonies etc. Children and adolescents then lead on peer – to peer education around child marriage, and participation in the clubs aim to empower them to detect, monitor and report child marriage or teenage pregnancy cases to NGOs and advocate in communities against the risks associated with child marriage. When targeting girls, few NGOs have also included skills learning, coaching and mentoring, rights and a focus on education and how resist marriage as part of the curriculum of activities.

Participation in clubs and safe spaces is providing good opportunities for girls (and boys) to learn new skills and information about child marriage and teenage pregnancy, create social assets and new friendships and, for some, to build a sense of empowerment, belonging and agency to improve the situation in their community. Children and youth participating in clubs appear to have a sense of purpose and desire to help their communities. Also, FGDs with children in clubs suggest that participation has a positive effect on self-esteem and self-confidence in being agents of change. Involvement in clubs has strengthened children's confidence to speak in public on difficult topics such as child marriage, and to know where to seek assistance and help in case of need. A good example of youth engagement is witnessed through peer-led SRH information and education, but only one project across the whole portfolio assessed had used this approach thus far.

Whilst these are positive signs, there is still limited evidence that young ambassadors are actually reporting cases of child marriage to club mentors – this could become very risky and isolating for them. Also, only a minority of projects targets out-of-school (OOS) children thus potentially missing out on a very vulnerable target group. Given high enrolment rates, targeting in-school children may be an efficient strategy to maximise outreach, but it also means that those not in school may be left out, something which must be explored further and calibrated in programming.

#### ***4.2.3 Strengthening access to and provision of services, particularly education and birth registration***

With a particular emphasis on supporting birth registration and access and retention to education services, alongside encouraging strategic cooperation between communities and District Assemblies, part of UNICEF's approach has considered ways to strengthen access to and provision of services. In general, this assessment found that organisations and GoG agencies have good mutual relations and actively collaborate in carrying out various activities from the beginning of the interventions. In all cases and projects, organisations consult with GoG agencies such as the Department of Social Welfare and Community Development, the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE), Ghana Education Services (GES), Ghana Health Services (GHS), the Department of Gender (DoG) etc., in the design and implementation of activities, and at times also run through them the locations and the issues they want to tackle for suggestions and advice. NGOs also involve GoG agencies as facilitators in local awareness raising and trainings on child marriage and other issues. At times NGOs build local authorities' capacity on specific child protection topics and even support them in building and approving budgets that involve child protection. Community child protection reflections and dialogues, led by government agencies and civil societies

through a variety of channels, including through the use of the Child Protection Toolkit, are supporting community outreach prevention work and often function as platforms where sensitive issues and child protection cases are often identified and brought up to the attention of service providers in the referral system.

With regards to birth registration, UNICEF has invested significantly at the institutional level in enhancing this service across all ten regions as proof of age to help enforce the law on child marriage and other child protection concerns. As of early 2017, the UNICEF-supported programme had trained 544 registration volunteer staff and had instituted 60 mobile birth registration units to increase access in low performing districts. 534,329 children have been registered in 2016 or 63% of the national target for 2016, although rates of registration vary across regions and districts and overall the rate of registration has stalled.

In the education sector, UNICEF has been supporting GES in the review of the Gender in Education policy with the aim of strengthening the enabling environment for girls' education, developing guidance for an education sector response on prevention and management of early pregnancy among school girls as well as facilitating opportunities for young mothers to re-enter school at the basic and secondary level. UNICEF has also trained 131 Girls Education Officers (GEOs) in gender issues. In addition, the Education Programme capitalised on and further extended support to GES' Complementary Basic Education (CBE) programme for out of school children age 8-14 years old currently operational in nearly 50 districts. It also supported two NGOs working in 80 communities in two districts to address the needs of an estimated total of 1800 out-of-school (OOS) children per year and ensure their re-enrolment in formal education thus, ultimately, contribute to delaying the age of marriage.

During primary data collection, the issues of ensuring access to services and of limited government resources emerged regularly as key areas hindering the effectiveness and sustainability of the strategies employed and the trust towards the government. For example, with regards to birth registration, despite the use of mobile systems, access to mobile registration remains low, especially in hard-to-reach areas and costs and access to birth registration points are an issue for families (especially from remote areas), who also sometimes don't find this document particularly useful. With regards to education, despite parents' openness to allow OOS girls to attend CBE classes with a view of re-entering formal school, it was observed that rate of female enrolment remain low if compared to boys. It is possible that girls are not enrolling in or dropping out of CBE classes or are simply struggling to maintain regular attendance because they simply don't have time or are too tired to enrol due to a heavy schedule of household chores and studying. This may be particularly true for older girls, who would be more at risk of marriage.

NGOs try to link up with local government structures, especially District Assemblies and the respective Social Services Subcommittees, to ensure that they are aware of the issues and allocate funding in their budgets for child protection, including child marriage specific services. Organisations link up regularly with Social Development Officers, who are more visible in the communities and, when available and present, with the Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit (DOVVSU) of the Police for serious child protection cases. Similarly, GES or child protection officials piggyback on NGOs' field visits to co-facilitate sensitisation activities, something which strengthens their collaboration and ensure their presence on the ground. Whilst these are positive signs and although Ghana has invested significantly in the decentralisation of services, money is not yet reaching regional and district level service providers. Even when budgets are appropriately designed and funding requests are duly completed, funding appears to simply not be trickling down at local level. This hinders the effectiveness and sustainability of interventions and fuels the distrust of local communities towards government services, as discussed previously.

#### **4.2.4 Supporting national level child protection coordination mechanisms, including promoting learning, information and data sharing**

In 2014, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, with Dutch funding support, set up a Child Marriage Unit (CMU) within its Domestic Violence Secretariat, with the task of coordinating all child marriage efforts and producing and disseminating relevant information nationally. The work of the CMU has been valued by partners, especially those in Accra, who have actively participated in the elaboration of the National Strategic Framework on Ending Child Marriage (2017-2026), launched in May 2017 and which was attained after extensive national consultations over a period of two years. The Unit has also managed to provide visibility to Ghana's efforts on ending child marriage in influential regional and international platforms. The Unit believes that through its work the public gained more awareness that child marriage is not just an issue for the northern regions, where prevalence rates are higher, but it is a national problem. The Unit's engagement with the media has also triggered a change in the language around child marriage, moving beyond the image of forced marriage of young girls with older men, to include informal cohabitation as a result of teenage pregnancy.

As a result of this approach, inter-ministerial coordination particularly across the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP), Ministry of Education (MoE), the Ministry of Health (MoH) and the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MOLGRD) appear to have strengthened and several important policies, plans and guidelines that address key drivers of child marriage, such as teenage pregnancy, adolescent girls' school drop-out, child and family welfare, are being formulated and approved, hopefully complementing efforts across sectors. Also, the Unit has provided a platform for stakeholders, including the GoG, CSOs and NGOs as well as traditional and religious authorities, to maintain dialogue as well as information sharing and learning.

However, the CMU is not *de facto* a Unit, as its legal status has not yet been approved by the Public Service Commission and its sustainability may always be at risk. Going forward, it will be critical for the Government to ensure that the Child Marriage Unit is fully embedded in the structure of the MoGCSP to ensure that the gains so far achieved are sustained and enhanced.

#### **4.3 Efficiency and sustainability aspects**

Efficiency and sustainability of interventions can be measured, beyond budget expenditure, also in the ways in which organisations are linking up with each other on the ground, collaborating and sharing resources, complementing each other's activities, linking up with, capitalising on or supporting the role of local authorities and working with local communities to ensure ownership and sustainability of projects. UNICEF encouraged partners to make programmatic linkages where they appear to address roots causes of child marriage through a more holistic approach. The assessment found that organisations and local GoG agencies do collaborate with each other as at times they operate in the same regions and are aware of each other's work, involve staff members in the implementation of community consultations and participate in country or regional coordinating mechanisms, albeit this is done ad hoc. Presumably such collaboration should help to avoid the duplication of programmes and resources.

UNICEF also counted on other agencies' programmes bringing complementarities from a programmatic and geographical coverage perspective (e.g. MoGCSP Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) programme, UNFPA-supported programmes on ASRHR etc.). However, no mention of linkages to these programmes was found in partners' documentation and there was no clear evidence from the projects visited, that these linkages existed. Ultimately going forward, UNICEF will need to identify ways to promote such integration at regional and district level, either through promoting regional dialogue on progress, or empowering the local-level government structures to play a more prominent coordination, information sharing, and strategic resource allocation role.

Overall all organisations and GoG agencies are still highly dependent on external funding, with limited capacity to raise additional financial sources to continue their work. Some NGOs have used their own core funding to facilitate meetings with communities, support Peer Educators or local networks of volunteers to continue with some activities, while searching for other funding sources. While these mechanisms are positive, overall it shows that the majority of organisations would not be able to continue full implementation without funding from UNICEF and many activities would stop. It is important that organisations are prepared and able to swiftly seek other funding using stronger evidence of what was achieved through the UNICEF supported programmes to back their proposals and requests.

#### **4.4 Data collection and measurement of results**

This assessment found that at the project level, not all organisations have strong M&E systems in place and where they do exist, there is a clear difference in their quality and usefulness. Only a minority of projects presented structured logframes, with clear indicators and tracking of such indicators, however often conflating input/activities with outputs and outputs with outcomes/results. Beyond collecting sex and age disaggregated data, no other socio-economic indicator is used to identify specific vulnerable groups that may need more support, especially as not all poor people are vulnerable in the same way. The collection of information on specific socio-economic indicators would further clarify not only who projects are reaching but, more importantly, whom they are not reaching.

Gaps in M&E are often based on individual organisational capacity, requiring varying degrees of support in building light-touch M&E systems, a ToC and Results Frameworks that outline what projects intend to achieve and how, what the steps are in the logical chain and what assumptions would support a certain approach or selection of approaches. Partners also require support in building clear/comprehensive baselines, in order to distinguish between attribution and contribution to results. Such gaps in the M&E system result in projects reporting mostly on activities and having limited insight on the outcomes of their projects, including on the poorest and most vulnerable target groups. This is an area that moving forward UNICEF and partners in country should continue to invest in and strengthen.

## **5. Conclusions: what are we learning about what is working to address child marriage in Ghana and what needs to be improved?**

UNICEF has invested a significant amount of funding to support numerous projects in 10 regions in Ghana. Projects have covered more than 650 communities, presumably reaching thousands of people.

**Below is a summary of strategies and approaches that are starting to yield positive results:**

### **At national level**

- Substantive national advocacy efforts have positioned child marriage as a political priority and vocal public advocacy is ongoing. The many projects and the extensive national campaign led by the MoGCSP have raised the profile of child marriage in Ghana. The wider public, through the information coming from social and traditional media, are aware that child marriage is an issue of concern. The CMU, now set up and functioning, has established a National Coordination Platform and developed a National Strategic Framework to end Child Marriage (2017-2026). Overall, the work of the CMU within the MoGCSP is valued by partners.
- The work of UNICEF is in line with these efforts and there is clear convergence of objectives between the GoG, NGOs and in UNICEF's strategy to address child marriage.

### At community level

- Sensitisation activities at the community level, especially dramas, have included high levels of participation, especially among women and children. Lively discussions have led to improved dialogue and awareness on the physical dangers to girls of marriage and teenage pregnancy, the legal ramifications of child marriage, the importance of girls' education and the value of intergenerational communication.
- Community leaders and members are making public commitments to abandoning child marriage through various means, including using local champions and households to act as role models, door-to-door outreach, and community meetings to find commonly agreed solutions and develop community action plans.
- Participation in clubs and safe spaces is providing good opportunities for girls (and boys) to learn new skills, build self-esteem, create social assets and new friendships and, for some, to build a sense of empowerment and belonging. Children and youth participating in clubs also appear to have a sense of purpose and desire to help their communities.
- The Complementary Basic Education (CBE) programme is contributing to increasing the opportunities for OOS girls to continue education and to re-enrol in formal schooling.
- NGOs have put in place mechanisms for strengthening ownership of activities within communities especially by capitalising on community stakeholders and existing community-based structures to run activities and collaborating with local traditional and religious authorities.

### Collaboration between GoG and NGOs

- Collaboration between NGOs and GoG agencies has been strong and has led to more streamlined approaches, messages and activities at the community and national level.
- NGOs are building local authorities' capacity on not only child marriage but also on related child protection topics. NGOs are also actively supporting them, including in service delivery and the development and approval of budgets that address the needs of children.

Whilst these are good signs that the interventions are starting to yield some results, **there are some areas the need strengthening and further reflection.**

Firstly, **child marriage and the linkages to structural drivers such as poverty and teenage pregnancy need to be further understood.** They need to be further explored with communities beyond a social and behaviour change approach that frames them as 'problems' or behaviours that can be 'corrected' with the provision information. While there is no doubt that child marriage is driven by gender discrimination, especially efforts to control adolescent girls' perceived burgeoning sexuality and avoid pregnancy out of wedlock, this assessment revealed that in the face of harsh reality of poverty for children and families, marriage becomes essentially a livelihood strategy to lift themselves out of poverty and ensure the continuation of their communities.

**It must be also recognised that, whilst there may be situations in which girls are 'forced' to marry, in many other situations some girls choose to marry, in agreement with their parents and use marriage as a viable option to escape poverty and to transition to adulthood,** which in Ghana is still linked to marriage and family formation. Until these issues are recognised and further trust is built between communities, service providers and NGOs, and until appropriate and acceptable alternative life options are truly available the risk is that communities will only superficially engage with projects and the GoG, and that child marriage will still continue and that substantial change will take much longer time to manifest.

**This recognition needs to be mirrored in the design of holistic programmes that address the diversity and interrelated nature of the drivers of child marriage** through approaches that combine social and behaviour change with poverty reduction and decreasing households and community economic

vulnerability, address adolescent sexual and reproductive health (including for young mothers), improve parental education and parental care to support children’s development, improve access to quality education, vocational and technical training opportunities etc. A multi-sectoral strategy and contextual approaches are necessary, which provide children and their care-givers with different life options and choices beyond marriage and pregnancy. Also, **a long-term generational investment of 10-15 years should be pursued to tackle the issues at stake and focused on supporting children and adolescents but also their parents and care-givers.**

These aspects are linked to **a final, crucial area for improvement, which is concerned with generating evidence through applied research and M&E.** Thus, UNICEF and partners need to strengthen their learning about child marriage in Ghana by investing in strategic data collection through intense ethnographic research, beyond the data collected for the child protection baseline in 2014 and available MICS and DHS surveys. They should also invest in the design and development of simple and flexible M&E systems, and support partners in the implementation, in order to learn by doing and adapt where mistakes or gaps are emerging. Ultimately, the somehow fragmented funding approach employed by UNICEF in its approach thus far has resulted in too many initiatives in different communities and less opportunities to systematically learn as well as implement innovative approaches that tackle the root causes of child marriage or holistically link child marriage with poverty reduction, education, health, empowerment strategies. A ‘less sparse’ and more focused programmatic approach is therefore suggested moving forward.

## 6. Recommendations

The below recommendations are addressed to the specific audience of the assessment and are outlined on the basis of the mandate of the different actors that participated in this assessment. However, they should be acknowledged and remain valid for all partners.

### For UNICEF

**Establish a UNICEF inter-programmatic Technical Working Group, comprised of all key UNICEF sections that can contribute to addressing the underlying causes of child marriage.** This group will lead any programme going forward on this topic. Ensure that this group informs the design of holistic interventions that tackle the key drivers of teen pregnancy and poverty alongside investments in ASRHR information and services, access to education, support parental care, addressing gender inequalities driving forms of SGBV, etc.

**Support integrated cross-sectoral programmes, where girls at risk/ married girls/ teen-mothers can be reached with a plurality of services.** Services should include: welfare and protection, counselling, ASRH, maternal health and nutrition, education, livelihoods and income generation, legal / justice support, etc.

**Continue to integrate child marriage interventions within broader child protection system strengthening work and cross-sectoral work.** This would include capitalising on informal child protection systems and available local resources.

**Conduct in depth ethnographic research in selected districts on the drivers of child marriage to use as a baseline for future programming.** Focus on understanding key areas such as: teenage pregnancy, poverty, access to education, SRH and sexuality issues and links to livelihoods opportunities. Utilise existing studies and evaluations from the continent as a basis to build more nuanced research questions and, later, implementation strategies.

**Ensure that data collection includes the identification and analysis of socio-economic indicators.** This would help to address the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalized girls and what they are experiencing (e.g. OOS girls, rural areas, poorest households, etc.).

**Focus on understanding girls' agency, desire to marry and form a family and what other opportunities would be available to delay marriage.** Explore options with girls and boys, parents and caregivers and incorporate findings in programme design and accountability mechanisms.

**Focus on researching local gendered constructions of masculinity, sexuality and the role men and boys in challenging gender inequality and work with communities to challenge gender stereotypes around sexual conduct and sexual behaviour. Engage boys and men in this dialogue** using examples from continental and international initiatives such as South Africa's Sonke Gender Justice, Nigeria's Voice for Change and Brazil's ProMundo.

**Review the conceptual approach of the programme, stepping back from the predominant focus on a national behaviour and social change campaign. Re-focus on devising a holistic programme, which would include linkages to other areas that are important for communities' wellbeing** (teenage pregnancy, livelihoods, education etc). Set realistic goals within the current context and in a selection of targeted regions/districts where strategies can be tested: take time to reflect on the objectives, assumptions, risks and red lines of the approach, and from there review key activities, inputs and resources.

**Design and articulate a Theory of Change and a logframe in collaboration with all NGO and GoG partners supported, making assumptions clear and risks explicit at all levels of the Theory of Change.** Validate and further articulate the feasibility of the approach. Regularly review the Theory of Change and logframe to assess whether goals and assumptions are still standing and realign the programme accordingly.

**Invest in building a strong UNICEF-internal Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system and include a staff member with specific responsibility related to this.** This would include leading the design of a contextualized ToC and common logframe with key stakeholders and devising a system whereby project-level approaches and data feed into a common ToC and logframe.

**Support partners and projects in building stronger M&E systems.** This would include providing them with: training and capacity building in project design, results monitoring and M&E; more streamlined reporting templates, including across various UNICEF Sections, that build on the requirements of PCAs and SSFAs and go beyond activity reporting- to report at logframe level and including qualitative data. Ensure that results are linked to UNICEF's wider results framework and ToC.

**Design a gender strategy and mainstream gender across the programmes.** Go beyond a set of individual activities that support girls to address the supportive and hindering role of men and boys; devise approaches that benefit men and boys alongside women and girls. Ensure that all projects have a gender approach and that empowerment is mainstreamed across projects.

**Conduct regular learning reviews with NGOs, donors and the GoG to review progress, discuss constraints and articulate ways forward.** Encourage cross-learning among projects and GoG partners. Ensure that donors are present in these discussions to keep them informed and updated as the programme and projects proceed.

**Explore local-level funding disbursement mechanisms.** Because funding disbursement from the central to the local level appears to be problematic, explore ways to support local level actors' work alongside central level initiatives.

**Support the Government to better analyse available budget across sectors and advocate for decentralized budget allocation.** At the same time, support formal actors within the child protection sector to identify and tap into the resources of the informal sector through partnerships and collaborations while in the process.

**Continue to focus on strengthening the education system and increasing the accessibility of quality educational opportunities for girls, including those who are pregnant, as a strategy to keep girls in school and delay the age of marriage.** Focus on understanding why and at what stages in girls' lives retention

in school is at risk and to what extent this may be due to girls' heavy household workload, protection and safety concerns, etc. If this is the case, explore ways, to support them and their families to recognize and manage this burden.

**Mainstream birth registration in project communication and awareness activities, promoting the practical benefits of birth registration.** Continue pursuing the expansion of birth registration service points, thus making registration more accessible for those living in marginalised areas.

**If any critical intervention or approach is outside of mandate, capacity and scope, map and identify other programmes or implementing partners that may support the above initiatives.** Continue to integrate child marriage with other programmes.

#### For NGOs running projects at the community level

**Promote local ownership.** Identify, with the community, what is known about child marriage and its causes; build projects with support from communities and validate approaches with them.

**Ensure that children and adolescents, particularly adolescent girls, have an opportunity to contribute to project design.** Ensure that their voices and opinions are heard and taken into account.

**Realign communication strategies with multi-sectoral programming and build on positive community-led messaging.** Shift communication strategies from negative attitudes of girls', boys' and families and focus instead on positive and productive messages. These should elaborate sustainable and meaningful opportunities for girls to actively participate in their lives and those of their communities. The aim of this approach would be to build bridges, based on girls' real needs as identified by girls and families themselves. These strategies should be accompanied by an elaboration of multi-sectoral programming so as to ensure that the benefits that these programming generates are clearly communicated.

**Address the underlying structural causes of the disabling environment that leads to child marriage. Move away from a focus on 'problematic' behaviours and choices to articulating alternative, viable life options for girls, boys and their families, building the larger enabling environment rather than tackling child marriage as a wrong behavioural practice.** Address the multiple and complex factors that drive child marriage, proposing viable and acceptable alternative life options for children, working closely with communities to identify and articulate such options as well as the benefits that would ensue from adopting them (and how they would manifest at the community level).

**Devote time to understanding how and why disparities in child marriage exist within the same country and how poverty and social inequality manifest themselves in different communities.** Emerging information can feed into the design of ambitious, holistic, multi-sectoral interventions because child marriage is complex and multi-faceted and cannot be effectively addressed by Child Protection Section-led interventions alone. Interventions could encompass:

- Advocacy campaigns and lobbying to strengthen access to quality education, focusing on understanding issues of retention of adolescent girls, linked to time use and household chores, protection and safety concerns;
- Promoting age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education and SRH, including youth-led and support to teenage mothers; use this as an entry point to discuss access to health, SRH and contraception;
- Addressing the values and attitudes that underpin gender inequality and notions of masculinity and femininity, including linked to sexuality, transactional sex, boys' responsibilities and sexual entitlement etc.;
- Focusing on girls' empowerment, including building girls' social assets, soft and hard skills and self-esteem;
- Campaigning government to strengthen social protection and poverty-reduction and employment generation activities;

- Supporting parents to be able to better understand the complexity and sensitivity of adolescent transitions and to better care for their children, beyond monitoring children's movement, to support them in emotional and psychological development, education, skills training etc. As girls are often the responsibility of the mothers, help mothers who are generally more burdened by the reproductive work they are responsible for in the household;
- Building on the positive evidence of youth-led activities and peer-education as ways to generate and instigate peer reflections on viable alternatives to marriage/cohabitation;
- Guiding communities, traditional and religious leaders to consider less punitive approaches (for example in their declarations) and more positive/empowering approaches that tackle the real drivers of child marriage, so they are in best interest of children as well as monitoring what is changing in communities after declarations are made;

**Use evidence of what is working/not working to strengthen girls' empowerment.** Capitalise on the use of the child protection toolkit to support communities to move away from discussions that tend to place the blame for girls' pregnancy on girls' (or adolescents) behaviours to identifying how adolescents can be supported with empowerment, SRH and other measures.

**Nurture strategic alliances with key stakeholders for advocacy purposes.** Continue to strategically link with local-level GoG stakeholders and build their capacity in budget design and allocation. But also capitalise on UNICEF's role to support them in advocating for the release of funding from central level. Identify ways with UNICEF to ensure better release of funding at local level that can support the effectiveness of interventions.

**Work together with UNICEF and other funders to assist in the development of tools to measure the effectiveness of programmes and to learn as programmes evolve.** This should be done before any project is implemented. Identify and work in consortium with other NGOs that are operating in the same areas, to capitalize on programme synergies and joint advocacy efforts.

**Ensure sensitivity to gender and social inclusion issues and that interventions at community level allow for spaces to be reserved for women and girls and for more vulnerable groups to explore their constraints, as different from those for men and boys or simply those in positions of power.** This is particularly true for adolescents as well as for children from younger age groups in clubs, whereby younger children may feel shy to express their views in front of children from older age groups, as well as for girls, whose needs and requirements are different than boys'.

**Link behaviour change work with interventions that address the multi-faceted drivers of child marriage.** These include addressing family poverty, skills development, supporting employment/internship schemes and other economic empowerment initiatives, scholarship schemes and other supporting strategies, etc.

**Focus on teenage pregnancy as an essential driver of child marriage as revealed in many reporting documents and in this report.** Make SRH, girls' control over their own body, discussions with parents about access to SRH services, comprehensive sexuality education etc. a central tenet of the approach, as part of a girl-centred approach as well as an approach that is based on understanding girls' transition to adulthood and socialisation processes. Pursue critical engagement of boys and men to ensure they are part of the dialogue and act as agents of change.

**If any activity, target group, strategic approach is outside of mandate, capacity and scope, map and identify other programmes or implementing partners that may support the above initiatives.** Attempt to integrate child marriage with other community and institutional programmes.

### For donors of child marriage programming

**Consider child marriage and adolescent girl development efforts not as ‘stand-alone’ issue.** Rather, as global best practice shows, as part of broader holistic approaches and system strengthening efforts in child and family welfare, education, health, social protection sector, etc.

**Require that projects on child marriage link up with other initiatives of the implementing agencies and GoG who are responsible for tackling the issue.** Require that such linkages be made explicit through strategic choices in terms of locations and complementarity of approaches.

**Require strong justification for single-sector or multi-sector programmatic approaches.** Keep in mind that rigorous evaluation of child marriage interventions globally and across the continent emphasise that in order for any intervention to be successful, the employment of a multi-sectoral approach is required.

**Consider the long-term 10-15 years generational investment required to address child marriage.** This is due to the nature of the structural issues that affect the practice and the social development, poverty reduction and behaviour change interventions that are required to tackle the issues at stake and ensure meaningful and sustainable change over time.

### For the Government of Ghana

**Ensure that appropriate financial and human resources are allocated to the effective implementation and decentralized coordination and monitoring of the National Strategic Framework to address Child Marriage (2017-2026).**

**Support Government analysis of available budget across sectors and advocacy for national and decentralized budget allocation.** At the same time, support formal sector to identify and tap into the resources of the informal sector through partnerships and collaborations whenever possible.

**Ensure that the Child Marriage Unit of the MoGCSP is fully embedded in the official MoGCSP structure.** This is to ensure that the gains and learnings so far achieved are sustained and enhanced.

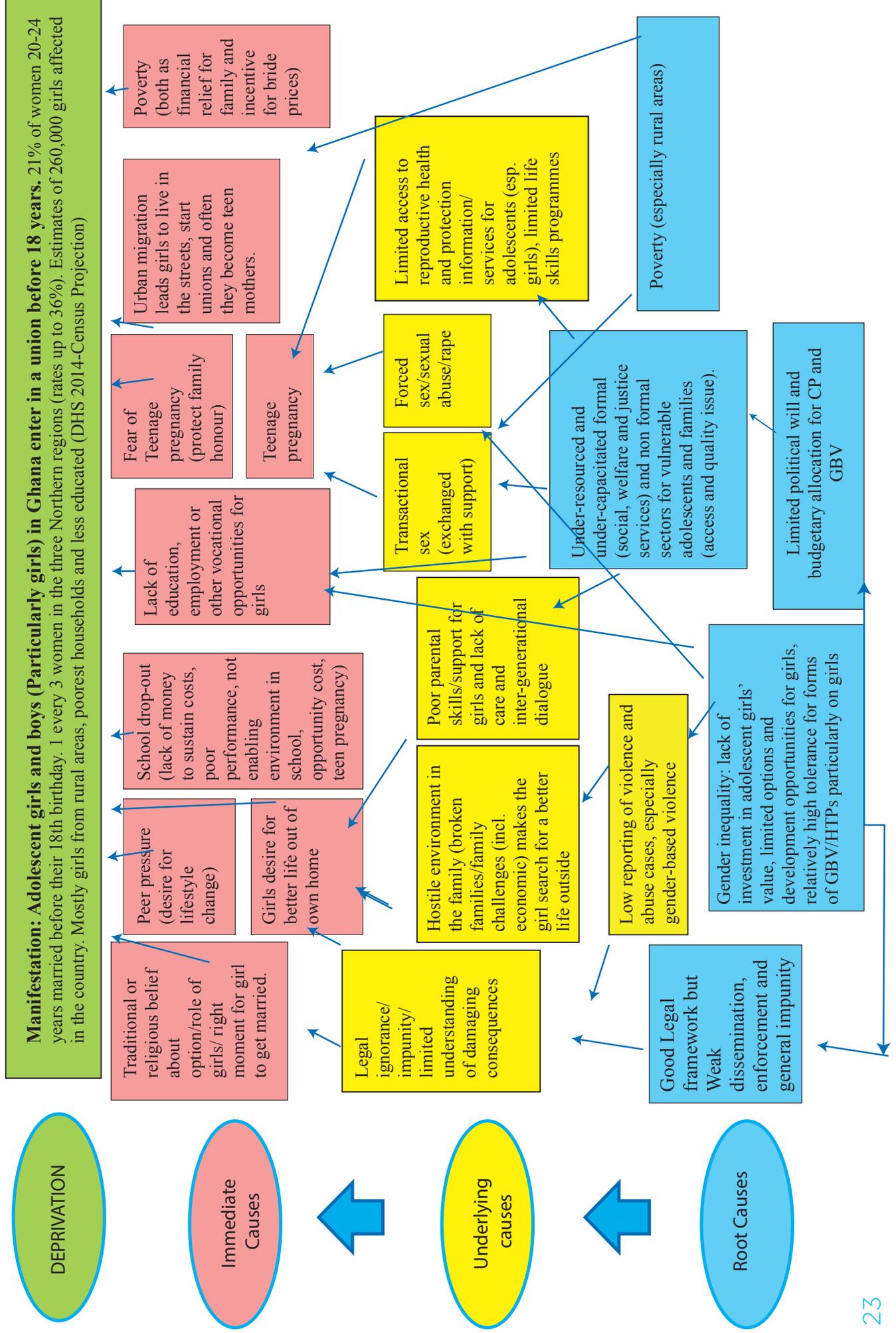
**Continue pursuing regular data collection and consultations at local level.** Learn from the population how child marriage is affecting their lives, what their needs are and what strategies are most effective. Ensure that data collection includes practical examples and evidence of where services are failing to meet people’s needs or where they are successful, as a way to conduct evidence-based lobbying for allocation of resources.

**Ensure that budget allocations at national and decentralized levels (Metro, Municipal and District Assembly levels) are increased and followed by appropriate disbursement.** This is to ensure appropriate allocation of resources to child marriage programming, enabling efficient service delivery across welfare and protection, justice, health, education, social protection and other sectors.

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Annexe I: Problem tree



## Annexe II: Theory of Change

### THEORY OF CHANGE FOR THE UNFPA-UNICEF GLOBAL PROGRAMME TO ACCELERATE ACTION TO END CHILD MARRIAGE IN GHANA

**Girls in Ghana fully enjoy their childhood free from the risk of marriage; they experience healthier, safer and more empowered life transitions while in control of their own destiny, including making choices and decisions about their education, sexuality, relationship formation/marriage, and childbearing.**

#### Impact

#### Outcomes

Adolescent girls at risk of and affected by child marriage are better able to express and exercise their choices

Households demonstrate positive attitudes and behaviours toward investing in and supporting adolescent girls

Relevant sectoral systems deliver quality and cost-effective services to meet the needs of adolescent girls

National laws, policy frameworks and mechanisms to protect and promote adolescent girls' rights are in line with international standards and are properly resourced

Government of Ghana and partners support and promote the generation and use of robust data and evidence to inform programme design, track progress and document lessons

Empowering girls with information, skills, and support networks (ASRH info and services, sexuality education, life skills, legal literacy, skills for employability) through mentoring, peer-to-peer, safe spaces, girls clubs, etc.

Information sharing, reflections and dialogues with children, parents, community members, traditional and religious leaders, local authorities to promote equitable gender norms, incl. delaying marriage for girls and support to alternative for girls (through durbars, community meetings, local and mass media, mobile theater, etc.)

#### Strategies

Enhancing the accessibility and quality (age/gender responsive) of education, health, child and family welfare and justice services for girls (tools, guidelines and capacity building of service providers related to adolescent health, CSE, education, child protection and SGBV issues)

Offering economic support and incentives for girls and their families (financial literacy/employability skills development, social protection)

Fostering an enabling legal and policy framework (national strategic framework on ending child marriage, adolescent pregnancy strategy, national adolescent health service policy and strategy, child protection legal review) and support GoG in its cross-sectoral coordination capacity on the issue

Support generation and use of robust data for scaling up interventions (new research / analysis of existing data/ assessment and evaluations of strategies and approaches, trend analysis, measurement of change )

#### Drivers and causes

Discriminatory cultural and social norms including gender roles

Adolescent pregnancy (need to unpack)

Inaccessible and low quality services such as education, health, social welfare, legal, psycho-social support, income generation

Girls desire to marry, form a family, be supported and acquire a better social status

Limited economic support and opportunities for girls

Limited implementation of legal and policy frameworks to protect adolescents, particularly girls

Family breakdown, parenting challenges, inter-generational dialogue issues

#### Problem

Poverty (with its multiple dimensions)

Girls married/union as children persists as a challenge in Ghana. 21% national prevalence rate of girls married/union before 18.





**The UNFPA- UNICEF Global Programme  
to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage in Ghana**



Government of the Netherlands