

Research Strategy for Phase II

UNFPA-UNICEF
GLOBAL
PROGRAMME
TO END CHILD
MARRIAGE

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BACKGROUND

The elimination of child marriage is now globally recognized as a central target for achieving progress on gender equality under Sustainable Development Goal 5. It is embedded in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and its Programme of Action. In 2020, a resolution on child, early and forced marriage (CEFM) was adopted by consensus at the Third Committee of the 75th Session of the United Nations General Assembly (2020)¹ highlighting root causes and response measures to end CEFM. The resolution acknowledged that adolescent girls are most affected by CEFM and called for transformative and participatory responses and adequate funding, including uninterrupted access to sexual and reproductive health-care services; adolescent-centred services; and redistribution of unpaid care and domestic work. The resolution reinforced international consensus among Member States, as well as the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), that ending child marriage is a development and human rights imperative. As a further sign of the global commitment to this issue, the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage (the Global Programme) was conceptualized in 2014–2015 and implemented its first phase from 2016 to 2019 in 12 countries. The Global Programme is, since 2020, implementing its second phase (2020–2023).

The Global Programme to End Child Marriage (2016–2030)

Phase I (2016–2019) aimed to strengthen institutions and systems in selected locations and countries to deliver quality services and opportunities for a significant number of adolescent girls.

Phase II (2020–2023) aims to accelerate actions to end child marriage by:

- Enhancing investments in, and support for, both unmarried and married adolescent girls
- Engaging with key actors to catalyse shifts towards positive gender norms
- Increasing political support, resources, gender-responsive policies and frameworks
- Engendering respect for laws
- Improving data and evidence on what works

Phase III (2024–2030) has the longer-term, gender-transformative goal of enabling significantly larger numbers of adolescent girls to fully enjoy a childhood free from the risk of marriage.



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Taking stock of the evidence

The Global Programme's strategies and interventions are informed by the global evidence base on child marriage. In 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) (specifically, the UNDP-UNFPA-UNICEF-WHO-World Bank Special Programme of Research, Development and Research Training in Human Reproduction, HRP), UNICEF, UNFPA and Girls Not Brides organized an expert meeting in Geneva to jointly review progress made in building the evidence base on child marriage, and to identify critical data and evidence gaps that were impeding progress in preventing and mitigating child marriage. At the meeting, two extensive reviews of peer-reviewed and grey literature, covering 787 and 386 papers respectively, were presented.^{2,3}

The evidence base on child marriage has grown rapidly and substantially over the past decade.⁴ The term “child marriage” itself has become more standardized, facilitating common understanding and comparison opportunities between studies (even though in some context, such as the Latin America and Caribbean region, the term has yet to reach full recognition). Whereas earlier research documented the existence of child marriage, its prevalence across countries and its consequences, the past decade saw an increasing share devoted to determinants, drivers and other factors related to child marriage. The current body of evidence on child marriage focuses most strongly on the rights, sexual and reproductive health, and educational aspects of child marriage. From the lens of a socio-ecological model, the existing research focuses more on individual and family factors, and to a lesser extent on community, institutional and policy factors related to child marriage.

Areas where the current evidence is stronger include the following:

- Consequences of child marriage, including related to sexual and reproductive health, intimate partner violence, social isolation, mental health, and economic costs.
- Determinants and correlates of child marriage, including girls’ education, family socioeconomic status, economic opportunities for girls and families, urban/rural residence, age- and gender-based power structures, fear/control/exploitation of adolescent sexuality, and insecurity.
- Prevalence and trends in child marriage, at global, regional, national and (first-level) subnational levels.

Gaps in knowledge identified by the evidence reviews include intervention-effectiveness research (prevention and mitigation), implementation research, prevalence of child marriage in specific regions and contexts, and its impacts on specific subpopulations.

The results of these field-wide reviews and analyses of Global Programme knowledge products formed the basis for discussions and deliberations at the expert meeting, which identified a complementary and reinforcing set of research priorities for the global community.

Research in Phase I of the Global Programme

In preparation for its second phase (2020–2023), the Global Programme conducted a series of stocktaking exercises to review what had been learned in Phase I through programming, policy work, advocacy and research. The independent evaluation offices of UNFPA and UNICEF conducted a joint evaluation of the Global Programme⁵ to inform the design of the next phase. The programme also commissioned a review by the UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, ‘Research Insights from Phase I’.⁶ Finally, the programme compiled two publications catalogues, covering 2016–2017 and 2018–2019.

In Phase I of the Global Programme, 157 knowledge products were produced,^{7,8} approximately 30 of which provided evaluative information on outcomes or on programme strategies, including girls’ empowerment, communication for development, and health and protection service provision. The majority of the studies conducted under Phase I were focused on prevalence and trends, drivers, perceptions and norms, and programme mappings – similar to what had been found in the overall global evidence base – and being an important step for Phase I of the programme, which was laying the foundations for long-term change.

The joint evaluation of the Global Programme noted that while the programme is highly relevant and responsive to local contexts, understanding of the causal links between programme outputs and outcomes is tenuous. The few impact evaluations conducted focused on only one or two strategies of the programme’s theory of change, which limited learning from Phase I on intervention pathways.

These exercises clearly pointed to the need for a research agenda for the Global Programme so it could be a more effective consumer and producer of evidence that is focused and rationalized – designed to fill local knowledge gaps and strengthen global understanding of what works to end child marriage in specific contexts.



RESEARCH AND LEARNING IN PHASE II OF THE GLOBAL PROGRAMME

Aims of the strategy

Building on global research priorities, and achievements and gaps in learning in Phase I, the Global Programme has developed a research strategy for Phase II and beyond to improve, unify and amplify its contribution to evidence on child marriage both nationally and globally. The strategy aims to ensure that quality evidence can inform national and subnational policies and programmes, and improve their effectiveness in preventing child marriage and supporting married girls in scalable, sustainable, rights-based and gender-transformative ways. The strategy also supports the Global Programme's aims of making enhanced contributions to the global knowledge base as a global good. Finally, the strategy supports improved accountability for results in the Global Programme, particularly at the outcome and impact levels.

The strategy is part of a comprehensive learning approach that integrates programming, monitoring, evaluation, and quantitative and qualitative research. It defines new learning objectives and research priorities for Phase II. It also describes how planning of research is integral to the programme, by using all stages of the programme cycle as learning points for strategic programme design, reorientation, implementation (and course correction as needed), evaluation and learning. It offers a series of tools

to facilitate reflection on current and future research to ensure that it is designed, focused and implemented to build the evidence base on which interventions work, why they work, and how they work, in diverse contexts and for various subpopulations.

Who is the strategy designed for?

The primary audience for this research strategy is Global Programme focal points in UNFPA and UNICEF global, regional and country offices, and their partners and stakeholders – to help improve their understanding of *what works, how and why*, to reduce the incidence of child marriage and mitigate its impacts in the specific contexts where they work. It is designed to support them in rationalizing their research needs on the basis of the available evidence in their context and the contextualized Global Programme theory of change (and associated assumptions along the causal pathways from strategic interventions to outcomes), select priority research questions, and select appropriate methodologies. It is also designed to foster collaboration between UNFPA and UNICEF, and more broadly between the Global Programme and key research initiatives at the regional and country levels.

The implementation of the strategy will be supported by in-house research and data expertise at the national, regional and global levels. The Global Programme will partner with the UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti to provide tailored research support to selected country and regional office studies. The Global Programme–Innocenti partnership has prioritized four key goals:

1. To quality assure the generation of credible, relevant and contextualized studies of mixed-methods effectiveness and impact from Global Programme countries
2. To support implementation research and capacity
3. To synthesize available evidence to identify gaps and avoid duplication
4. To work with the Global Programme knowledge management focal points to promote evidence translation and uptake at national, regional and global levels

Research priorities for Phase II

Based on the review of the evidence base, and the Global Programme’s evolution over Phase I, several thematic research priorities have been identified for Phase II.

1. Effectiveness of interventions to prevent child marriage. This includes emphasis on rigorously evaluated interventions across:

- Focus populations (including those targeting girls, boys, parents, communities at large, and local leaders)
- Intervention type (single component vs. multicomponent) and content
- Specific sectoral investments (e.g., in education and health)

2. Implementation research, focusing particularly on what it takes to deliver effective interventions or packages of interventions at scale and sustainably, to delay age at which marriage occurs and to uphold girls’ rights. This could include questions such as:

- *Coverage and equity*: Who is covered by the intervention? What are the attributes of those who are covered, and those who are not, among the target population? How could programme or service delivery be made more equitable and inclusive?

- *Appropriateness/acceptability*: How appropriate is the intervention, given the population, setting and key drivers of child marriage? What were stakeholders’ perceptions of the interventions (relative advantage, credibility, etc.)?
- *Fidelity*: What was the degree to which the intervention was implemented as it was planned? How, and to what extent, was the intervention adapted throughout the implementation process? Did the previously tested programmes exhibit the intended/unintended effects when transferred to a new setting?
- *Integration*: Can multiple interventions be effectively packaged and successfully delivered to improve integration and impact? If so, what implementation models make this feasible?
- *Cost*: Was the implementation approach used cost-effective? How much does it cost to deliver the intervention? Is this affordable? Could adaptations to design make the intervention more cost-effective?
- *Adoption*: To what extent was the policy or intervention adopted and/or scaled up by implementers? What intentions do stakeholders have to adopt and/or scale up the intervention in the future?
- *Feasibility*: Was it possible to implement the intervention in the specific context, given the human and financial resources available, the structures, etc.? What were the factors influencing how well (or poorly) the policy or intervention was implemented? How can these contextual or implementation-related factors be modified to increase chances of success?

3. In relation to impact and process evaluations, there are **specific groups at risk of or affected by child marriage** who are less understood. These include groups such as younger adolescents, girls living in humanitarian settings, child brides, and separated, divorced, widowed and orphaned girls. Further, the evidence that does exist on child brides generally focuses more on supporting their school reintegration or sexual and reproductive health needs, and less on the experience of marriage and programmatic efforts to promote equitable marital relationships, gender equality in household roles and responsibilities, and equitable decision-making in the use of contraceptives and on childbearing. Child marriage among boys and young men, and the role played by extended family, such as parents-in-law, have also not been well explored to date. Additional data and evidence are also needed in specific under-researched regions and contexts,

such as humanitarian settings, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East and North Africa, and West and Central Africa, including from Francophone and Hispanophone countries.

4. More evidence and analysis is needed on **secular changes in age at marriage at macro and meso levels** to understand the complexities and nuances of what drives changes in age at marriage and related outcomes (e.g., girls' education and adolescent childbearing) in some geographic areas and populations but not others. While child marriage is declining in some countries or regions within countries (and potentially increasing in some), the full set of contextual factors contributing to these changes has not been well described (e.g., laws and policies, marriage market, economic, environmental and political insecurity, social infrastructure, and gender-equitable normative environment).
5. More research is needed on **gender transformation as an overarching strategy** to end child marriage – research that supports a broader understanding of the complex linkages between child marriage and discriminatory gender norms and practices in all their forms. For example, research is needed on the links between child marriage and gender-based violence, female genital mutilation and/or sexual exploitation – not only on their co-occurrence, but also on common antecedents and opportunities for joint intervention and transformation. Better understanding of causal pathways between gender discrimination and child marriage can enhance synergies in multisectoral programming. Research that accompanies gender transformative interventions can capture critical change elements such as shifts in gender norms, and empowerment, including changes in the distribution of power and resources.

Methodological priorities

There is considerable variation in the way in which child marriage has been studied in the published literature. For example, different indicators have been used to measure prevalence of child marriage (e.g., via current and retrospective analyses or with different age cut-offs) and estimates of absolute numbers have not been consistent across countries. The most common child marriage study type is synthesis of existing evidence. For primary research, household survey data, key informant interviews and focus groups are the most common methods of

data collection. To date, there has been little cohort and longitudinal analysis.⁹

A few key methodological priorities emerge for future research on child marriage:

- Ensure longer evaluation frameworks (short-term evaluations might find beneficial effects, but medium-term evaluations may find that effects have dissipated).
- Unpack 'modifiers' (i.e., individual and household characteristics) and design options to assess differential effects on girls/boys, older/younger children and adolescents, and parents/leaders, and to understand the 'why' behind intervention results.
- Use a wider range of quantitative and qualitative data sources including school-based surveys, mobile self-reporting, and special surveys focused on vulnerable groups (e.g., very young adolescent girls and displaced populations) to better understand needs and programme performance.
- Invest in participatory action research (e.g., human-centred design) to ensure meaningful engagement of adolescents and young people in policy and programme development, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. Train young female mentors on participatory action research to expand their opportunities, and contribute to income generation and skills-building.
- Develop more specific definitions of target population groups (e.g., making clear that 'married girls' refers to currently and formerly married girls including widowed, divorced and separated girls).
- Develop clear definitions of scale, depending on the nature and magnitude of the problem, the size of the country, and the type and longevity of the impact targeted.
- Consider challenges for research in humanitarian contexts: how to provide estimates of current child marriage rates, ethical considerations in conducting research with children and adolescents in humanitarian settings, and maintaining the safety and security of data collectors.

In the next section, tools are provided for strategic reflection on current research activities and how they can be strengthened to ensure that evidence on effectiveness and implementation of both child marriage-specific interventions and more general programmes with potential impacts on child marriage can be strengthened.



DESIGNING RESEARCH AND LEARNING TO MEET PROGRAMMATIC GOALS

The Global Programme and its partners have made strides towards ending child marriage and supporting married girls. However, challenges to effective, scalable, gender-transformative programming remain, as do barriers to measurement of outcomes and impact. It is important to understand what evidence is needed: to overcome specific programme challenges; to measure the impact of priority strategies at national, subnational and local levels; and to add to the global evidence base on what works in ending child marriage. Consequently, research activities for Phase II of the Global Programme need to be carefully oriented to achieve the gender-transformative, multisectoral approach envisioned in the programme's theory of change.

Linking research to the theory of change

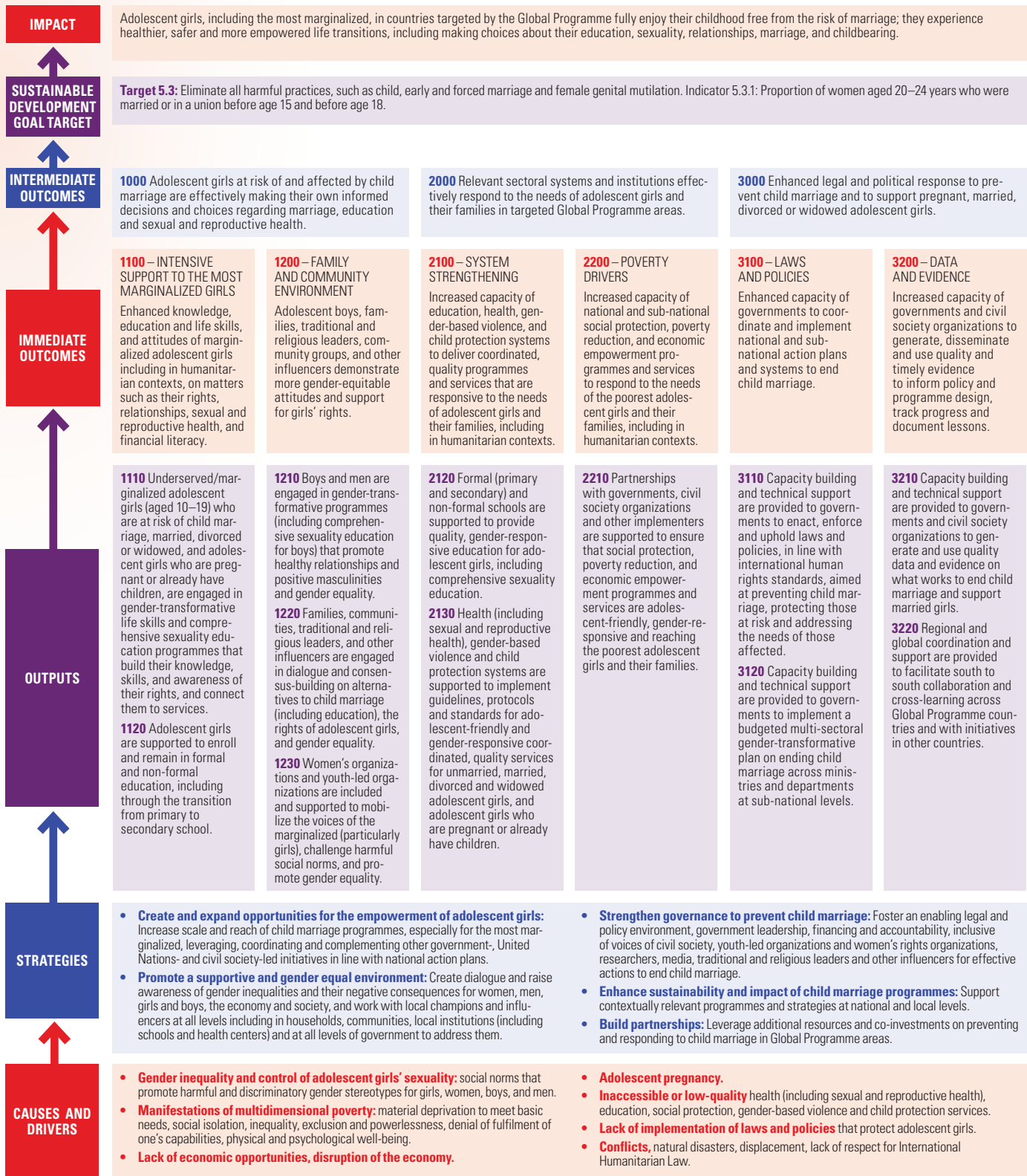
Linking the Global Programme's research efforts with its theory of change (ToC) helps to ensure that research activities contribute to achieving the aim of helping girls fully enjoy their childhood free from the risk of marriage. Figure 1 shows the revised ToC for Phase II of the Global Programme, modified to emphasize strategies and intended outcomes. The ToC has been updated for

Phase II to strengthen results-based management, and includes a greater emphasis on gender-transformative approaches to ending child marriage, and poverty as a determinant of child marriage. It also more explicitly recognizes the Global Programme's role in catalysing multisectoral and cross-sectoral evidence-based efforts to address child marriage, in development and humanitarian settings, as well as through a nexus approach.

At the heart of the theory of change is an adolescent girl-centred approach that aims to empower the individual adolescent girl to make decisions about when and whom to marry, within a web of support that involves her family, the community, society and public structures, institutions, systems and services.

– Global Programme Phase II Programme Document¹⁰

Figure 1. Global Programme Phase II theory of change¹¹



PROBLEM: Child marriage and early union (of adolescent girls and boys) persists as a common practice in many societies and is associated with a combination of structural, economic, socio-cultural factors and broader gender inequality. Lack of locally acceptable alternative life opportunities pushes adolescent girls and boys into marriage. A total of 650 million women and girls alive today were married as children.

In the Phase II ToC, causes and drivers inform five key strategies, which focus on the empowerment of adolescent girls, a supportive and gender-equal family and community environment, governance, impactful and sustainable programming, and partnerships. These strategies are envisioned to yield outputs and immediate outcomes (intensive support for marginalized girls; boys and men are engaged in gender transformative programmes; family and community environment; system-strengthening, poverty drivers, laws and policies; and data and evidence) that contribute to three key intermediate outcomes: adolescent girls making their own informed decisions; systems and institutions responding to the needs of adolescent girls and their families; and enhanced political and legal responses.

Inherent in the model are assumptions and hypotheses about how change happens, and which factors influence or mitigate progress along the causal chain. For example, girls empowered with life skills and comprehensive sexuality education will be better able to make and negotiate major decisions about their lives, including on school continuation, marriage and childbearing. Or, as another example, health systems that are age- and gender-responsive can help unmarried girls protect themselves from unintended pregnancy, and thus delay marriage triggered by pregnancy (to avoid stigma, to support the child, etc.). Each assumption or hypothesis poses a potential challenge to the programme intervention logic (i.e., why specific strategies may not result in the outputs or outcomes as anticipated in the global ToC), and these assumptions may vary by country or region as detailed in context-specific ToCs.

Identifying research needs

Research activities carried out under the Phase II research agenda will aim to ensure greater understanding of gender-transformative approaches to:

- Support specific subpopulations of girls at risk of and affected by child marriage
- Transform social and gender norms and power structures
- Ensure effective multisectoral programming
- Scale up and sustain programmes

Countries within the Global Programme have their own contextualized ToCs and programme strategies that generally align with the programme's global ToC. Country-level strategies may have context-specific causal pathways leading to associated outputs and outcomes, based on locally relevant hypotheses and assumptions. These assumptions, and the degree to which country programmes can mitigate or address them through their strategies, could have a significant impact on the effectiveness of the Global Programme in its stated objectives. Research conducted in the Global Programme can help test these assumptions and pathways, and critically interrogate the ToC - allowing the programme to make iterative improvements within and across phases in the choice of strategies and how they are implemented. [Tool 1 of this research strategy](#) ('Example research questions and strategies by outcome') provides examples of key research questions for each programme outcome.



Planning research

To reflect progression from Phase I to Phase II, and keep the emphasis on the Global Programme's goal to end child marriage, research activities carried out under the programme will include both process and evaluative methods (evaluation and implementation research). Global Programme country focal points within UNFPA, UNICEF and implementing partners can use the suggested checklist ([Tool 2: 'Global Programme research planning checklist'](#)) to guide the rationalization and design of upcoming research in the context of current data and evidence availability.

Choosing appropriate methods

Research questions can be formative (to inform the design or adaptation of an intervention package), exploratory, operational or process oriented (to understand how and why specific strategies or interventions are operating, and increase efficiency and sustainability), or evaluative (to document effect, lessons learned, good practice, replicability). Methods should match the stage of the programme. [Tool 3 \('Selected research methods for the Global Programme'\)](#) provides a list of research study types and related methodologies.

It is important to note that the research agenda of the Global Programme is inherently linked to the results framework of the programme,¹² and the monitoring and evaluation objectives of the programme. Which research questions can be investigated and how, is at least partly dependent on the monitoring and evaluation processes the programme has established. Not all research questions require a discrete study – much can be done with programmatic data that is already being collected to improve assessment of and learning from programme performance through scheduled stocktaking moments during implementation. Ensuring the programme is designed robustly to collect monitoring and evaluation data and lessons learned throughout the programme cycle will increase the options for quality research and documentation.

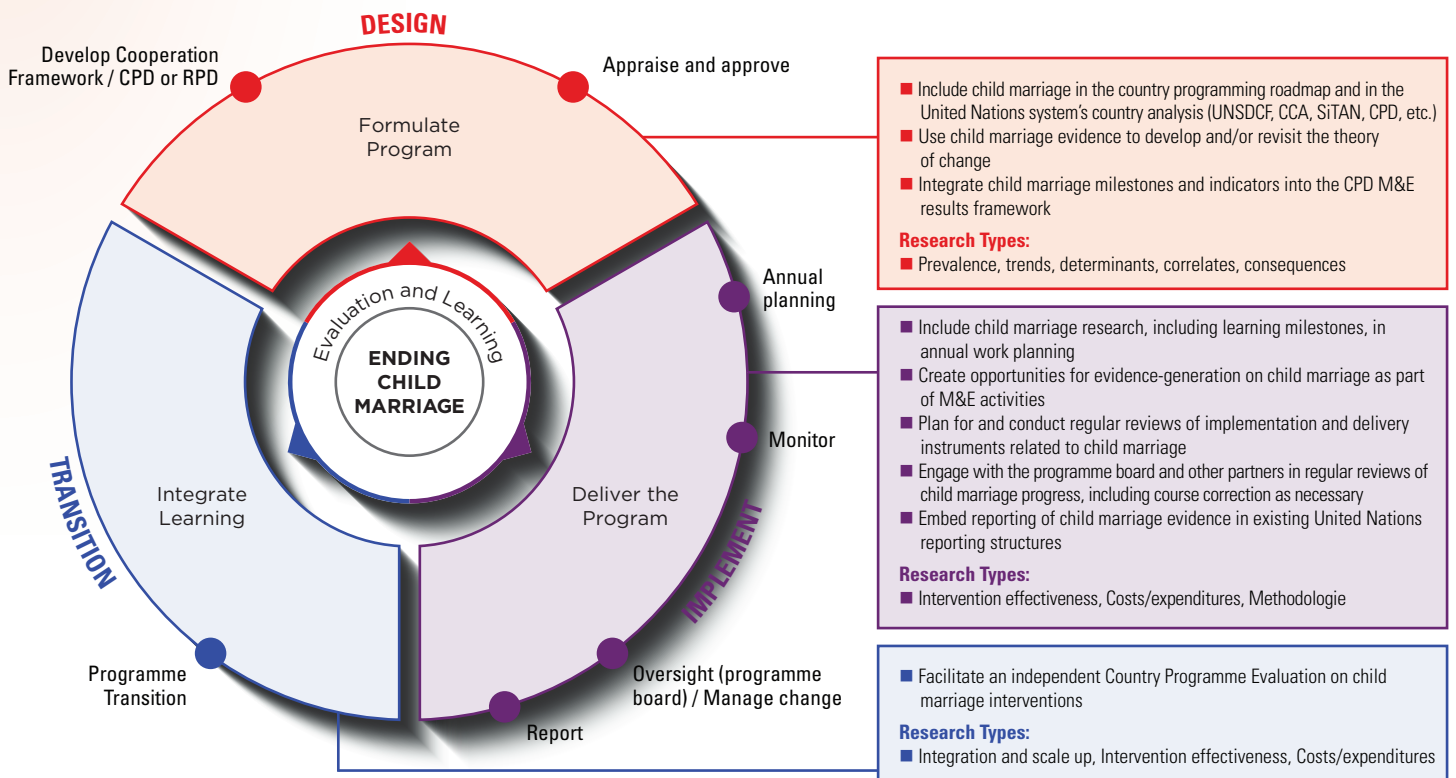
Research principles

Global Programme research should be in line with the United Nations Evaluation Group's norms and standards for evaluation,¹³ including internationally agreed principles, goals and targets; utility; credibility; independence; impartiality; ethics; transparency; human rights and gender equality; national evaluation capacities; and professionalism. In particular, Global Programme research must adhere to UNICEF's ethical standards for research and evaluation.¹⁴

- 1. Respect:** This principle involves engaging with all stakeholders in a way that honours their dignity, well-being, participation and personal agency. It also acknowledges any limitations to this agency. Respect requires responsiveness to sex, sexual orientation, gender, race, language, country of origin, age, background, religion, ethnicity, ability, and cultural, economic and physical environments.
- 2. Beneficence:** This principle means striving to do good for people and the planet while minimizing harms arising from evidence generation. It requires the weighing of harms and benefits. The data collected must be purpose-driven (directly informed by the activity or benefit), proportional (only collecting what is required) and protective of children's rights.
- 3. Justice:** The principle of justice requires that consideration is given to who benefits and who carries the burden of evidence generation and the broader equity of the project, its implementation and outcomes. The work should be 'people-centric': ensuring the needs, interests and expectations of people – especially, children and their caregivers – are prioritized by those handling data about them.
- 4. Integrity:** This principle necessitates the active adherence to moral values and professional standards, which are essential for all evidence that is commissioned or undertaken.
- 5. Accountability:** The obligation to be answerable for all decisions made and actions taken, and to be responsible for honouring commitments, without qualification or exception, and to report potential or actual harms observed through the appropriate channels.

SITUATING RESEARCH AND LEARNING IN THE COUNTRY PROGRAMME CYCLE

Figure 2. Situating research and learning in the Country Programme cycle



CCA, Common Country Analysis; CPD, Country Programme Document; M&E, monitoring and evaluation; RPD, Regional Programme Document; SiTAN, situation analysis; UNSDCF, United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework.

The Global Programme is designed to support governments and civil society in accelerating progress in their goals of ending child marriage and upholding girls' rights. Based on the programme's vital policy and programmatic support role, and its place within an architecture of United Nations in-country support, research produced by the Global Programme must inform national priorities and align with how United Nations support is delivered in the country, and the United Nations Country Programme cycle and timelines. The guidance below helps programme managers and implementers situate Global Programme-related research and data collection within the Country Programme cycle to inform and improve programme management and effectiveness.

Recommendations are provided at each stage of the cycle to create feedback loops between programme design, evidence generation and programme adaptation. Recommendations cover how knowledge gaps will be filled throughout the programme cycle and adaptation of programming in light of evidence of what works.

Design phase

In accordance with the Common Country Analysis–United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (CCA–UNSDCF) process, programme formulation can be guided by a road map and informed by a situation analysis.

ROAD MAP

- While outlining the UNSDCF preparation process for the road map, ensure that evidence review moments on child marriage data are included at critical steps of the Country Programme Document development.

UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM'S COUNTRY ANALYSIS FOR PROGRAMMING

- Country Programme preparation must be based on an agreement on national priority issues and on an updated situation analysis of the immediate and underlying causes of those priority issues. Using child marriage learning and research insights from previous programme cycles, focus areas for programming should be flexible to be able to include emerging topics and trends. At this stage, taking stock of accumulated evidence and lessons learned from the previous programme is essential for the preparation or updating of a situation analysis.
- A summary of the country and global evidence on child marriage is a critical input into the CCA-UNSDCF prepared jointly by United Nations agencies and the government.
- A comprehensive analysis of country-level child marriage interventions, supported by evidence of what worked and what did not work, must be mapped against the evolving priority areas and target groups of the Global Programme. This mapping is helpful to identify areas where progress was achieved and where further support is needed, while supporting decision-making on priority investments for the next programme cycle.
- The country analysis process should ensure participation of key stakeholders, including government, civil society (including women and youth civil society organizations), other United Nations agencies and development partners. Stakeholder consultations should be used as opportunities for learning and dissemination of evidence from the previous programme cycle.
- Mobilize expertise from regional offices and headquarters as applicable to ensure quality assurance of the strength of the analytical work conducted at country level.

Development of Country Programme Document (CPD)

- Use child marriage evidence to develop and/or revisit the theory of change. Analytical work must be conducted to identify whether the child marriage evidence generated previously supports the assumptions of the ToC. Critical analysis must guide decision-making on whether unsupported assumptions reflect inadequate inputs (interventions), insufficient quality of evidence or incorrect assumption. Revisiting the ToC, and especially its assumptions, could highlight new data gaps which must be captured and integrated in the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and learning processes.

Plan for monitoring and evaluation

- The CPD monitoring and evaluation framework should plan for the following.
 - ➔ New research activity on child marriage topics to be carried out during the cycle with a clear description of the planned objective and methods, and a rationale for how it builds on existing evidence and/or fills an identified data gap. Ideally, the rationale should situate new research within the Global Programme strategy to support incremental knowledge building. Feedback loops with regional offices and headquarters could support the streamlining of research activities.
 - ➔ When new data are available (e.g., after each new piece of research), plan for systematic learning and dissemination events including formal public (face-to-face/online) presentation of results, and an analysis workshop with selected key country programme partners to reflect on how the programme should adapt to new evidence.
- Ensure that child marriage milestones and indicators in the CPD M&E are aligned with regional and Global Programme M&E frameworks.
- While engaging in programme strategic planning, and especially when common delivery approaches are possible (Delivering as One and Joint Programme), align M&E, research and learning events with other partners.
- Plan to integrate a focus on ending child marriage in the end-of-cycle Independent Programme Evaluation.

Implementation phase

ANNUAL PLANNING, WORKPLAN

- Attention should be paid to the timeline of key research, including learning milestones over the four years of a programme cycle.
- As new research evidence and M&E data are being generated, plan for (e.g., quarterly) 'learning moments' during implementation when analytical work can support a review of implementation and delivery instruments and, if necessary, develop course-correcting measures.

MONITORING

- As part of M&E activities, consider the following evidence-generation opportunities specifically related to ending child marriage.

TRACK PERFORMANCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use routine data collection for the CPD to identify progress (or lack thereof) on ending child marriage ▪ Scan context for change ▪ Identify needs and plan for rapid generation of new data (rapid assessments, rapid evaluation, etc.) ▪ Monitor operational performance
ANALYSE DATA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assess strength of data ▪ Assess factors related to progress (or lack thereof) ▪ Engage with Country Programme stakeholders in data review, learning ▪ Document lessons learned
USE DATA TO INFORM DECISION-MAKING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Create feedback loops with Country Programme partners for learning and programme adaptation ▪ Implement programme course correction measures based on documented evidence ▪ Share evidence and promote learning through partnership, advocacy and communication strategy

OVERSIGHT AND CHANGE MANAGEMENT

- Plan for regular engagement with Global Programme managers and partners at country, regional and global levels to share child marriage evidence and promote learning.
- Provide the Programme Board with evidence packages needed to justify programme suspension, extension and revision.

REPORTING AND DISSEMINATION

- Generate and share evidence that is simple to understand and relevant to the interests of policymakers.
- Plan for inclusion of child marriage evidence in the One United Nations country report, where applicable.
- Plan for inclusion of child marriage evidence in the UNSDCF and Results-Oriented Annual Report.

Transition phase

- At the stage of programme completion and transition, facilitate an Independent Country Programme Evaluation or Country Programme Performance Summary, as applicable. Plan early for the development of the evaluation terms of reference and mobilize country partners, regional offices and headquarters (as applicable) for a review of the learning objective of the evaluation.



CONCLUSIONS

Learning from Global Programme programming aims to influence local (within-country), subnational and national levels to generate commitment from national partners to bring effective programmes to scale. The Global Programme's focus on effective interventions with potential for scaling up is fundamental to accelerating large-scale change – reaching greater numbers of adolescent girls, their families and their communities.¹⁵

Through its research agenda, the Global Programme also supports greater coordination and uptake of new knowledge beyond national boundaries by sharing results, learning and innovations via various platforms. This includes engagement or partnerships with networks, organizations and social movements that can help reach and mobilize large constituencies of people with shared interests and willingness to act. An important step in this direction is the Child Marriage Research to Action Network (CRANK),¹⁶ a joint initiative of the Global Programme and Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End

Child Marriage. CRANK provides a platform for a better coordinated and harmonized global research agenda on child marriage, and encourages the uptake of research by policymakers and practitioners. It brings child marriage researchers, practitioners and policymakers together every three months to share and discuss the latest evidence on priority learning topics. It is also a knowledge management mechanism that tracks ongoing and upcoming research by CRANK members, monitors patterns, and identifies gaps. It complements Global Programme knowledge management efforts such as monthly research digests, open clinics and webinars on key topics, and publications catalogues.

The Global Programme is committed to working with partners to fulfil ambitious global and local research agendas, while enhancing its own accountability for delivering against its results framework. Partners are invited to stay connected to the Global Programme, and track the implementation of this strategy via knowledge syntheses, catalogues and events.

TOOL 1: EXAMPLE

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND STRATEGIES BY OUTCOME

INTERMEDIATE OUTCOME	PRIORITY RESEARCH QUESTIONS	METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS
Intermediate Outcome 1: Adolescent girls at risk of and affected by child marriage are effectively making their own informed decisions and choices regarding marriage, education, and sexual and reproductive health		
1.1: Intensive support to the most marginalized girls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Which girls are most at risk of child marriage in this programmatic context? ▪ What do specific groups of girls (e.g., younger adolescent girls, girls in humanitarian contexts, and child brides including separated, divorced and widowed girls) need? ▪ Which gender norms or social and cultural practices restrict or limit women's and girls' participation in society? ▪ Did the interventions improve adolescent girls' skills and agency in the short and longer term? ▪ Did the interventions support adolescents to question and negotiate negative gender norms and gender role expectations related to child marriage? ▪ Did the interventions promote equitable marital relationships, gender equality in household roles and responsibilities, or equitable decision-making within marriage? ▪ To what extent did the timing of programme interventions at different points of adolescence matter? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identify approaches to understand and address the needs and problems of the hardest-to-reach girls and communities. ▪ Address challenges for research in humanitarian contexts: how to provide estimates of current child marriage rates, ethical considerations in conducting research with children and adolescents in humanitarian settings, and maintaining the safety and security of data collectors. ▪ Invest in participatory action research to ensure the meaningful engagement of girls in programme development, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.
1.2: Family and community environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Did the interventions target the right gatekeepers in the community? ▪ Did the interventions change parental, family and community attitudes, behaviours, and gender and social norms regarding age at marriage, choice of partner, childbearing? ▪ Did the interventions change attitudes, behaviours, and gender and social norms regarding adolescent rights, such as their rights to education, health and safety? ▪ How do adolescent boys experience child marriage? How do they negotiate gender norms and gender role expectations related to child marriage? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Unpack 'modifiers' (i.e., individual and household characteristics) affecting intervention delivery and effectiveness. ▪ Assess differential effects on men and women. ▪ Ensure that diverse young people are included in all stages of the research.

INTERMEDIATE OUTCOME	PRIORITY RESEARCH QUESTIONS	METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS
Intermediate Outcome 2: Relevant sectoral systems and institutions effectively respond to the needs of adolescent girls and their families in targeted global programme areas		
2.1: System-strengthening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How can the quality of education, health and protection services be improved to be made more adolescent-responsive and delivered synergistically? ▪ How can the coverage of services be improved to reach marginalized adolescents and their families? ▪ Can improved services help delay marriage or mitigate its consequences? ▪ What are the pathways through which services impact adolescent outcomes, for unmarried and married girls? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Invest in implementation research to generate lessons on delivering quality and equitable interventions at scale. ▪ Assess the cost, scalability and sustainability of single vs. comprehensive interventions.
2.2: Poverty drivers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Are child marriage and adolescent girls' interventions linking to social protection interventions and vice versa? ▪ How effective are cash transfers and what are their unintended consequences? ▪ How effective are cash+ approaches? ▪ What is the access to and impact of micro-savings programmes and of demand-driven job services? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Partner evaluations planned or under way. ▪ Can those evaluations be tweaked to provide insights into child marriage, adolescent girls, etc.?
Intermediate Outcome 3: Enhanced legal and political response to prevent child marriage and to support pregnant, married, divorced and widowed adolescent girls		
3.1: Laws and policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How is discrimination against women and girls institutionalized in law, policy or practice? ▪ Is the minimum age at marriage aligned with international human rights treaty bodies and without loopholes? ▪ Are related laws on the minimum age of consent to sexual activity and receiving services rights-based and aligned with the epidemiology in the country? ▪ Do child marriage laws intentionally or unintentionally criminalize voluntary adolescent sexual activity? ▪ Is there sufficient will and political commitment to sustain child marriage interventions? ▪ Are national action plans implemented as intended? ▪ Were there increased budget allocations towards child marriage? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Evaluating the success of legal and policy efforts at state or higher levels (using methodologies such as natural experiments, regression discontinuity design, time-series analysis, cross-national analyses). ▪ Documenting and analysing facilitating factors/actors and challenges to successful enactment and implementation of laws and policies.
3.2: Data and evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How have age at marriage and related outcomes changed at subnational (secondary, tertiary, local) levels? ▪ What are the trends and patterns in child marriage (relevant for Latin America and the Caribbean and Eastern Europe and Central Asia)? ▪ How do humanitarian crises affect child marriage patterns? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure longer evaluation frameworks (short-term evaluations might find positive effects, but medium-term evaluations often find that effects have dissipated). ▪ Prioritize disaggregated subnational data on levels and patterns of marriage, using data sources such as census or administrative data.

TOOL 2: RESEARCH PLANNING CHECKLIST

This checklist was developed to help country offices design, plan and conduct research on ending child marriage as part of the Country Programme cycle, and generate evidence in line with both country data and evidence needs and the Global Programme research strategy – focusing their research efforts on key priority topics, generating new evidence where it is really needed, and contributing to the body of evidence on child marriage globally.

Topics

What we know already: In general, globally, there is a wealth of accumulated evidence on: (1) consequences of child marriage; (2) correlates of child marriage, both risk and protective factors; and (3) national and (first-level) subnational prevalence and trends in child marriage.

1. Does the piece of research you intend to develop/ conduct address one of these three domains?
2. If yes, have you reviewed the existing literature/ evidence on this topic in your context, including evidence from beyond Global Programme-commissioned research?
3. If yes, does your intended research fill a gap identified in the existing literature/evidence on this topic in your context?

Where the knowledge gaps are: The following topics have been identified as critical knowledge gaps about child marriage globally. Please consider how your research could collect some data on one or several of these topics.

1. Does the research plan to assess effectiveness of an intervention or a package of interventions on delaying age at marriage and union, and other related outcomes such as adolescent pregnancy, school completion and gender-based violence?
2. Does the research focus on scale-up and/or feasibility and/or costs of a child marriage intervention and its sustainability?

3. Does the research include analysis of specific groups at risk of or affected by child marriage: younger adolescent girls, girls living in humanitarian settings, child brides (including separated, divorced and widowed girls), adolescent boys?
4. Does the research examine secular change in other macro- and micro-phenomena that may have contributed to changes in child marriage over time (e.g., female education, labour force participation, crisis and shocks)?
5. Does the research take an overall perspective of gender-transformation and intersection with other gender-discriminating practices and outcomes (e.g., female genital mutilation, gender-based violence)?

Research design

Please consider the following questions as you design your research.

1. How can the research incorporate the participation of the people experiencing the problem?
2. At what levels are the research questions targeted – process, output, outcome, impact? Do they cover the full spectrum of what is needed?
3. Does the research collect data on the modifying factors and pathways linking the strategies to their intended outcomes (e.g., knowledge and attitude changes)?
4. Are the chosen research methods commensurate with available resources and time frame (short- or medium-term frameworks)?
5. Have baseline, midline and end-line evaluations been planned?
6. Have data been collected in a control area for assessment of programme effects?

7. Does the study allow the measurement of neighbourhood- or population-level results representatively?
8. Are the sample sizes large enough to disaggregate specific subgroups?
9. Is there process documentation and learning to inform course correction of interventions (when things are not working as expected)?
10. Are financial data collected regularly and organized to allow for a costing or value-for-money study at the end of the programme?

Quality assurance

1. Is the timing of the research piece coherent within the Country Programme cycle? Is there sufficient time/ perspective of a next cycle after results are available to use this data for programming?
2. Have the terms of reference of the research or evaluation piece been reviewed and commented by relevant stakeholders (e.g., country partners, regional office, headquarters)?

3. Are appropriate resources (e.g., human resources with analytical skills, financial, logistical and time resources) to conduct meaningful research secured?
4. Is there a process for quality checks on the data so that they can be used for future evaluative or learning exercises?

Dissemination

1. How have you planned to disseminate the evidence generated by your research, including for advocacy purposes?
2. Have learning objectives been designed for specific target audiences?
3. What is the best format for various stakeholders and beneficiaries to gain insight into the programme and its results?
4. Do you plan to turn evidence into learning via internal (UNFPA/UNICEF) review, analysis and discussion of evidence and its impact on the Country Programme, including by engaging regional offices and headquarters; and, with Country Programme partners, engage in reviewing the evidence and discuss its impact on partners' projects and operations, and on policy level?



TOOL 3: SELECTED RESEARCH METHODS FOR THE GLOBAL PROGRAMME

PROGRAMMING STAGE	RESEARCH METHOD	WHAT	WHEN	HOW	LINKS TO SUGGESTED TOOLS OR METHOD DESCRIPTION
Programme design and early implementation	Formative research	Usually used to inform intervention design, target population and other programme factors. It can also explain contextual or normative factors that can affect programme implementation.	Before the start of the programme; to inform programme design.	Interviews, focus group discussion, law and policy analysis, stakeholder mapping, stakeholder analysis.	Global Early Adolescent Study (2021) ¹⁷ Compass resources for social and behavioral change (2021) ¹⁸
	Stakeholder analysis	A process of identifying and grouping stakeholders according to their level of participation, interest and influence in the projects.	Before the start of the programme.	Identify key stakeholders and map their relationships with the programme.	UNFPA Evaluation Handbook (2019) ¹⁹ Stakeholder Mapping for WHO Contraceptive Guidance (n.d.) ²⁰
	Understanding social and gender norms	A series of tools for identifying (diagnosing) social and gender norms.	Before or during implementation.	Mostly qualitative.	Advancing Learning and Innovation on Gender Norms (2021) ²¹ The ACT Framework: M&E for measuring social norms change around female genital mutilation (2020) ²²

* Please note that not all of the tools and method descriptions cited in the table are official United Nations guidelines.

PROGRAMMING STAGE	RESEARCH METHOD	WHAT	WHEN	HOW	LINKS TO SUGGESTED TOOLS OR METHOD DESCRIPTION ²³
Programme design and early implementation <i>(continued)</i>	Positive deviance	An approach to explore the successful behaviours or strategies of certain individuals facing similar challenges, constraints and resource deprivations as their peers.	At the start of programme	Mostly qualitative.	Positive Deviance Collaborative Tools (2021) ²⁴ Better Evaluation's Positive Deviance Approaches (n.d.) ²⁵
	Barrier analysis	Rapid assessment tool used in community health and development projects to identify determinants associated with a particular behaviour.	At the start of a behaviour change programme to determine key messages and activities for intervention. In ongoing programmes to focus on behaviours that have not changed much despite repeated efforts, to understand what is keeping people from making a particular change.	Focuses on eight determinants of a behaviour. Sample size of 90 household interviews (45 doers and 45 non-doers). Interviews through questionnaires and tabulation analysis.	Practical Guide to Conducting Barrier Analysis (2013) ²⁶
	Political economy analysis	An analytical tool focusing on the relationships between power and resources in a given context.	At the start of programme; to be repeated at appropriate stages in multi-year programmes.	Multi-level analysis looking at power and resources at the level of structures, institutions or agents, but also at the level of country, sector or problem.	Beginner's Guide to Political Economy Analysis (2017) ²⁷

PROGRAMMING STAGE	RESEARCH METHOD	WHAT	WHEN	HOW	LINKS TO SUGGESTED TOOLS OR METHOD DESCRIPTION ²⁸
Monitoring of implementation	Implementation research	An integrated concept that links research and practice to accelerate the development and delivery of public health approaches.	Research design is embedded in the design of the implementation with regular data collection throughout implementation.	Often mixed methods.	Implementation Research Toolkit (2014) ²⁹ Implementation Research: What it is and how to do it (2013) ³⁰
	Cohort studies	A non-experimental or observational study design in which participants are followed over time for the occurrence of the outcome of interest.	Research takes place along with implementation.	Quantitative or mixed methods.	Cohort Studies Methodology Module (2016) ³¹
	Process documentation	A detailed description of how an intervention is implemented. Can help assess intervention fidelity vis-à-vis original intervention design.	During implementation with repeated measurements.	Description of specific processes against selected quantitative and qualitative indicators. Case studies.	Process documentation research ³²
	Narrative change analysis	To measure changes in narratives as a result of social change.	During implementation.	Mixed methods.	Measuring Narrative Change (2019) ³³

PROGRAMMING STAGE	RESEARCH METHOD	WHAT	WHEN	HOW	LINKS TO SUGGESTED TOOLS OR METHOD DESCRIPTION ³⁴
Evaluation	Impact evaluation	A set of research methods and associated methodologies assessing actions and activities in terms of value, criteria and standards.	At the end of implementation.	Usually mixed methods – several methods must be used to ensure triangulation of findings. Can be theory-led or follow Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) criteria.	UNICEF Impact Evaluation Methodological Briefs ³⁵ OECD Evaluation Criteria (2020) ³⁶
	Randomized control trial (RCT)	A type of scientific experiment that aims to reduce certain sources of bias when testing the effectiveness of new treatments. This is accomplished by randomly allocating subjects to two or more groups, treating them differently, and studying how they progress to the outcomes of interest.	Throughout implementation but demonstrating impact at the end of intervention.	Quantitative.	Randomized Control Trial (n.d.) ³⁷
	Costing study Cost-effectiveness analysis	Costing studies examine the costs of an intervention vs. economic evaluations such as cost-benefit, cost-effectiveness, cost-minimization and cost-utility studies, which comparatively analyse costs and outcomes.	At the end of an activity/ intervention.	Quantitative.	WHO Cost-effectiveness Analysis for Health Interventions (various) ³⁸
	Most significant change (MSC)	Involves generating and analysing personal accounts of change and deciding which of these accounts is the most significant – and why.	Throughout implementation but demonstrating change at the end of intervention.	Mostly qualitative.	Most Significant Change (n.d.) ³⁹

ENDNOTES

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