

Save the Children response to the World Bank's formal consultation on the draft Gender Strategy 2024-2030

Save the Children welcomes a number of important shifts in the new draft and lessons learned from implementation of the existing strategy. These include the new conceptual framework and its strengthened emphasis on:

- social norm change as necessary for sustainable and transformative change, as well as recognition of how power relations can drive support or hostility toward gender equality;
- gender-based violence as a rights abuse impacting all efforts to drive progress for gender equality and economic empowerment;
- gender equality as critical not just for economic prosperity but most importantly, as a human right and with that, growing recognition of decision-making power as a measure of progress.

We welcome all of these, particularly following evidence that without social norm change and empowerment at all levels of the socioecological model, [increasing girls' human capital through critical services like education does not always lead to the increase in economic independence](#) and shift in decision-making power that allows girls to choose the lives and careers they want.

In addition to these points, we offer input on the following key areas:

1. Support for commitment to bring an intersectional approach to the Bank's work

[Relevant sections of draft strategy: Chapter II – Drivers of change for gender equality]

Recognition of the impact of intersecting power is well received and a priority supported by our consultations with girls. A girls' reference group we worked with to identify ways to better support girl-led advocacy highlighted help to make the spaces they collaborate in more accessible to girls with disabilities as a high priority. Implementation of this commitment to an intersectional approach should be supported by increased investment in collection of disaggregated data and use of new tools including two from Save the Children:

- Our [Gender and Power Analysis Tool](#), a guidance package bringing together feminist gender and power analysis, a child-centred and intersectional approach applied across all levels of the socio-ecological model. The tool provides research questions across different domains of analysis and power differentials (based on intersecting identities and characteristics) to help generate evidence in partnership with grassroots feminist organisations.
- The [Child Atlas](#), a data platform that visualizes, compares and analyses children's outcomes and inequalities (including at the subnational level) to inform efforts to reach those most impacted by inequality and discrimination. This platform builds on previous data platforms (our Child Inequality Tracker: GRID) including with the addition of data on policy, climate change, displacement and migration, women and girls' empowerment, conflict, access to services and the cost of living.

Data disaggregated by intersecting power differentials is critical to enable an intersectional approach and girls in countries with the least capacity to collect data are at the greatest risk of being excluded from the benefits this approach offers.

Recommendations: The Bank should increase investment in lower income countries to enable collection of disaggregated data (including in support of reporting against Sustainable Development Goal indicators), in line with efforts under the draft strategy to expand the scale of gender data and use of data to inform policy and integrate gender analysis into financing mobilisation and allocation.¹

2. Increase recognition of girls – and adolescents in particular – as population groups with specific needs and a critical life-stage for driving change

[Relevant sections of draft strategy: Chapter I – Their historic and ongoing urgent challenge; Chapter II: Drivers of change for gender equality; Chapter III: Foundational wellbeing: End gender-based violence and elevate human capital]

The Bank's 2016-2023 Gender Strategy supported some strong interventions for adolescent girls and the new draft strategy itself highlights the challenges to achieving gender equality among the current population of adolescents presented by the alarming reality that younger men exhibit more gender-restrictive views than those in their early 30s. Adolescence is a critical period when gender norms are shaped and crystallise, when gender discrimination becomes more acute and girls in particular often fall between child-focused programming (which is often gender-unaware) and programming for adults, which is ill-suited to their needs. Rights abuses like child marriage can have life-long impacts but can only be prevented during childhood, demanding a specific focus on girls in efforts to shift social norms and prevent, mitigate and respond to GBV.

Recommendations: Save the Children is keen to see progress under the old strategy protected and expanded upon including by:

- Explicitly including an age lens in its approach to intersectionality that recognises adolescents as a population with specific needs, particularly in relation to social norm change and GBV.
- Including measures specific to adolescent girls in the Results Framework for the new strategy to ensure that commitments under the strategy carry through to effective implementation.

3. The need for investment in girls' feminist leadership

[Relevant sections of draft strategy: Chapter II – Conceptual Framework; Chapter III: Foundational wellbeing: End gender-based violence and elevate human capital; Leadership – Engage women as leaders]

We appreciate the Bank's growing recognition of the importance of working with local actors (including community and religious leaders), and feminist civil society in particular to [economic empowerment](#), improved protections from [gender-based violence](#) and social norm change. The leaders of these movements start out as girls. Many girls are already leading successful efforts to create change in their communities, Save the Children is currently piloting our [Girl-led Movement Building Toolkit](#) in Bolivia, Nigeria, Uganda and Yemen and found that even in the toughest circumstances girls are working together to create change in their communities.

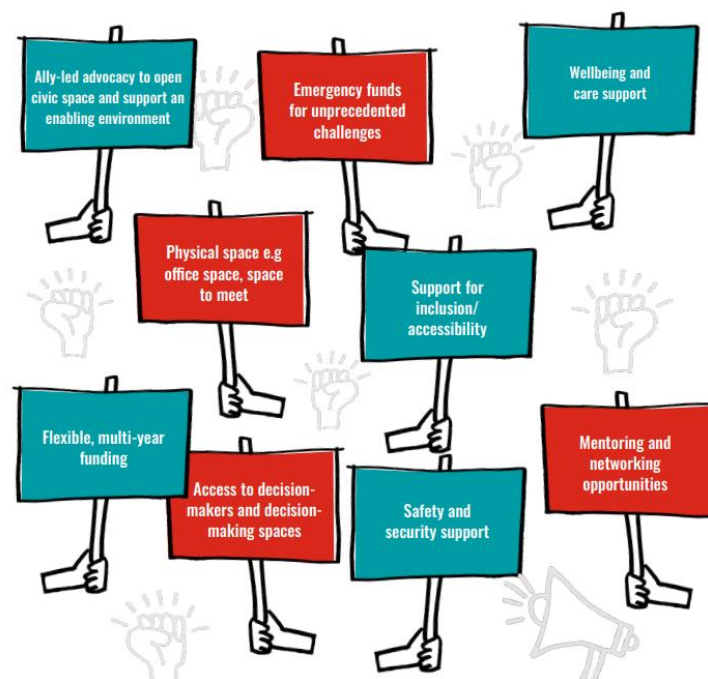
¹ See for example: Save the Children (2019) [Tipping the Balance: Tackling unequal access to healthcare to drive progress on child survival](#).

Yet girls still face barriers that inhibit their ability to collectivise, advocate, and influence. Their age specific priorities will not always be shared with adult groups or even youth over 18 who have different legal rights. Girls and girl-led groups must be a part of the Bank's increased engagement with civil society under the new strategy. The [US Girls LEAD Act](#), a bipartisan policy initiative that promotes girls' leadership and participation in civic and political processes through US Foreign Assistance provides a promising example of ways financing can support policy effectiveness by increasing girls' abilities to engage in decision-making to foster new generations of leaders. Save the Children has produced further guidance on how donors can support girl-led groups [here](#), based on consultations with a girls' reference group made up of 11 girls drawn from five regions across the globe. We have included recommendations on how that group advised that they would like to be supported under figure 1 below.

Recommendations: Girl leaders are a glaring omission from the "Engage women as leaders" outcome under the draft strategy.

- The Bank should clearly outline how it intends to engage girls and ensure accountability to them in implementation and setting priorities for investment, as well as how it can foster enabling environments for girl-led movements. Recognising that adequate consultation will not be possible ahead of finalising the draft strategy we would like to see commitment under the strategy to working with girls to determine how the Bank can best support girl-led civil society.
- The strategy should introduce mechanisms for girls to input to decisions around implementation and measuring progress, including linked to its Results Framework.
- Commit to increased, meaningful engagement with girls throughout the coming strategy period. Save the Children and partners (including those working together through the Adolescent Girls Investment Plan) are eager to help make the World Bank more accessible to girls including through adolescent-friendly material and support to bring girls and their views to Bank decision-making processes.

Figure 1: Support girls want for their girl-led groups and networks



4. Improving interventions in fragile contexts

[Relevant sections of draft strategy: Chapter I – The historic and ongoing urgent challenge].

The increase in global fragility, including as a result of conflict and the climate crisis presents significant challenges for girls and their rights. Nine of the ten countries with the highest rates of child marriage are fragile states, our analysis shows that globally, girls growing up in conflict zones are [20% more likely to be married as children](#) and that the number of girls living in child marriage-climate disaster hotspots will increase to [32.3 million by 2030](#). Save the Children has begun work to understand evidence gaps and opportunities to bring partners together to improve guidance on how to respond to child marriage in fragile contexts. We hope this work will improve understandings of how to enable continuity of service delivery and reform processes through changes in leadership and control, as well as how positive interventions introduced through humanitarian interventions can be sustained. The Bank as an important actor in this space and we are keen for this work to contribute to implementation of this aspect of the new strategy.

Recommendations: The Strategy should maintain its attention to fragile states and recognise the need for collaboration to improve guidance and support for gender equality in fragile settings, including the specific role that the Bank can play in supporting these efforts.

5. Support to cost policy interventions to ensure they lead to change

[Relevant sections of draft strategy: Chapter II – Drivers of Change (Financing)]

The draft strategy rightly recognises financing as a key driver of change. Correspondingly, lack of financing remains a significant barrier to effective implementation of promising policy. Save the Children's analysis of budget allocations to address child marriage has shown insufficient allocations for implementation and a lack of understanding among governments as to how much is already allocated to cross-sectoral activities that support efforts to end child marriage (such as girls' education). Despite the proliferation of national action plans and strategies driven by the AU's Campaign to end Child Marriage, to-date just one has been costed leaving governments and civil society with no clear understanding of the funding needed to give effect to their policies.

Recognising these challenges, in 2021, all 54 [AU Member States committed](#) to increase budget allocation in all relevant sectors to address child marriage through an integrated, inclusive, and participatory costing framework. In support of this commitment, Save the Children has developed a draft Costing Framework, currently out for consultation and pilot. The costing framework is intended to support governments to cost their multisectoral plans, to identify and fill funding gaps (including through external resource mobilisation) and will support transparency and accountability to girls and their communities.

Recommendations: The draft strategy should recognise the need to invest in the creation of costing tools to support adequate funding of laws, policies and other interventions aimed at progressing gender equality.

Save the Children looks forward to seeing the final version of the strategy and supporting its implementation, including as a critical component of the Bank's Evolution Roadmap.