



## Ending Child Marriage In Sierra Leone:

**100 Strong and Save the Children  
At Work Protecting Girls' Futures**



**Save the Children.**

## Progress Report: September 2021 – April 2022

On February 9, 2022, the Ending Child Marriage project team met with First Lady Madam Fatima Maada Bio (center) to discuss and plan activities for the coming months. Pictured left of Her Excellency is Patrick Analo, who took the reins earlier this year as Country Director for Save the Children in Sierra Leone. *Save the Children photo*

## 100 Strong Is Making a Difference for Girls

The 100 Strong fellowship has been instrumental in bringing to fruition Save the Children's Ending Child Marriage pilot in Sierra Leone. The multifaceted project seeks to end this devastating practice by focusing first on **15 communities from four chiefdoms in the rural region of Kailahun**, where 45% of girls marry before age 18 – the highest rate in the country. Our pilot is helping to pass and influence the implementation of legislation; engage local power-holders, community leaders, and men and boys as allies; and develop evidence Save the Children can use to replicate the approach and scale it up across Sierra Leone and in other countries. We are working closely with our partner, the First Lady of Sierra Leone Fatima Maada Bio, who escaped marriage, at a young age and has made it her mission to fight gender-based violence in her country.

As of May 2022, \$930,000 has been raised – 90% from 100 Strong – toward the overall goal of \$1.5M to carry out this critical two-year initiative, which officially launched in September 2021 and is slated to conclude in September 2023.

Right: [\*In the first 8 months of the Ending Child Marriage pilot in Sierra Leone\*](#), Save the Children has worked closely with those in the 15 participating Kailahun communities, rooting the program in the perspective of local leaders, elders, men, boys, and girls – including, of course, child brides.



## Summary of Activities to Date

The focus of these initial eight months has been to lay a strong foundation for success – to ensure that our work is grounded in the input and participation of those in power *as well as* those in the local communities who will drive our shared strategy for ending child marriage through Social and Behavior Change. To this end:

- The Project Team held meetings with the First Lady, the Minister of Gender and Children's Affairs, Parliamentarians, Paramount Chiefs, Traditional Leaders, and key networks such as the Gender Community of Practice and the Sierra Leone Adolescent Girls Network, to begin planning high-level advocacy efforts and events.
- We worked with the Kailahun District Chairman to identify communities known for high rates of teenage pregnancy and child marriage to implement this project.
- In close collaboration with Paramount Chiefs and community member from the four chiefdoms, we selected the 15 participating communities (those known for high levels of teenage pregnancy and child marriage, per the above). Then we worked with local leaders and community members to identify and train 40 champions (10 from each chiefdom) in advocacy, gender equality, protection, and child safeguarding policies and principles. These champions will be responsible for monitoring the project to ensure quality and timely delivery.

- Our Ending Child Marriage project team conducted many meetings with local leaders and stakeholders in the participating 15 communities to seek their contributions, buy-in and engagement.
- We undertook in-depth social research in these 15 communities, interviewing elders, young men and young women – including child brides and child mothers. Listening intently to understand their thoughts and feelings around child marriage and teenage pregnancy, together we identified their preferred solutions to these issues, and ascertained the roles they could play toward these solutions.

#### What Kailahun community leaders are saying:

- *“The approach of involving chieftom leadership and male engagement is good and we will give our support to make it successful.”* - **PC Ganawa, Paramount Chief of Kissi Teng Chieftom**
- *“The Council commits to this because children’s issues are everyone’s issue.”* – **A representative of the Kailahun District Council**
- *“Bringing men on board is necessary. Gender is inclusiveness, and the ministry will be happy to see more men brought on board because they have the power. This is a good trend by Save the Children, and the ministry is supporting this.”* – **Kailahun District Gender Officer**

Community leaders consistently emphasize the importance of engaging men through this pilot. As the above quotes suggest, men are eager to show that they can contribute to solutions rather than being viewed as the problem. Kailahun District Council Chairman Sahr K. Lamin, who also heads the Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Committee for the district, reflected the high level of enthusiasm – *even requesting the inclusion of more communities than the 15 selected for the pilot.*

## Now Is the Time to Act in Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone is well-positioned to make a profound shift in addressing child marriage and changing the social norms that surround it. Growing momentum within the country presents an extraordinary opportunity for 100 Strong and other partners in the pilot to have a shared impact on this critical issue, by creating an empowering environment where girls are supported and can pursue alternative choices and opportunities.

Government leaders are implementing a dedicated approach to ensuring all girls – including young mothers and pregnant girls – receive an education. The First Lady plays a leading role in the region in speaking out against child marriage and has reached 95,000 children, parents and government leaders through Sierra Leone’s *Hands Off Our Girls* campaign.

## Project Reach in Kailahun

We will directly reach at least 1,050 men, boys, girls and leaders in the 15 communities selected to participate in the project. Through various activities, we estimate direct participants will in turn reach 15,800 men, boys, girls and leaders. Chiefs are responsible for making sure that the process for selecting participants is fair and consistent. The project officers assigned to chieftoms will monitor the process to ensure fair representation.

| Chiefdoms            | Communities Within the Chiefdoms     |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Kissi Teng Community | Fowa, Turadu, Yelendu, Baima         |
| Peje Bongre          | Jorw, Bongre, Mano, Mawei            |
| Mando                | Njala, Kwiva, Morbia                 |
| Yawei                | Malema, Bendu, Bandajuma, Massayiema |

| Direct Participant Description   | Number per Community | Total Across 15 Communities | Activities   |
|--|----------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| <b>Boys age 13-18</b><br><i>In and out of school, including okada (bike) riders, young fathers</i> | 20                   | 300                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Train boys to support the eradication of child marriage in their communities.</li> <li>• Train boys on Sexual &amp; Reproductive Health and Rights, the laws, referral pathways and “gender roles.”</li> <li>• Boys develop action plans on what they want to do, how and when they will conduct activities.</li> <li>• Boys conduct campaign to End Child Marriage.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Girls age 11-18</b><br><i>In and out of school, including child brides and child mothers</i>    | 15                   | 225                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Train girls to support the eradication of child marriage in their communities.</li> <li>• Train girls on Sexual &amp; Reproductive Health and Rights, the laws, referral pathways and “gender roles.”</li> <li>• Girls develop action plans on what they want to do, how and when they will conduct activities.</li> <li>• Girls conduct campaign to End Child Marriage.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Men age 19 and older</b><br><i>Husbands, teachers, okada (bike) riders, traders, farmers</i>    | 20                   | 300                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Train men on roles and responsibilities, positive parenting, community parenting, child marriage, laws and policies to protect girls, and how they can cascade messages to mitigate this harmful practice.</li> <li>• Men develop action plans on what they want to do, how and when they will conduct activities.</li> <li>• Men hold monthly community meetings to engage other men, as well as mothers who are head of household.</li> <li>• Men become “pressure group” in their communities, monitor against child marriage, reinforce positive behaviors, and encourage leaders to create and implement supportive bye-laws.</li> </ul> |

|   |    |     |  |
|---|----|-----|--|
| <b>Leaders</b><br>District Council chairman,<br>members of Parliament,<br>Paramount Chiefs, religious<br>leaders, councilors, female<br>leaders in communities<br>including Mami Queens,<br>Head of Soves, and<br>Chairladies | 15 | 225 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Train leaders on roles and responsibilities, community parenting, child marriage, laws and policies to protect girls, how they can cascade messages to mitigate this harmful practice.</li> <li>• Support fellow leaders to draft bye-laws or strengthen existing bye-laws.</li> <li>• Delegate leaders as champions, sign commitments to agreed actions for their roles as champions.</li> <li>• Support fellow leaders to push for change/bye-laws at district level to be approved by District Council, so that bye-laws are implemented.</li> </ul> |
|---|----|-----|--|

## Ending Child Marriage Project Timeline and Highlights

We are pleased to report that the pilot is on-track with plans and activities to date, and poised to tackle the next phase as described in “Looking Ahead.”

### September 2021

Official project launch.

### November 2021

Save the Children sponsors a one-day meeting to kick off 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence.

*“This is one of the most important things in the President’s agenda. Right now, we are preparing laws. We are putting things together that will help to end child marriage. But we cannot do it alone. It is timely that Save the Children as a partner held this meeting with Paramount Chiefs and religious leaders who are very important in this work.”*

- *Madam Tarawallie*

Madam Manty Tarawallie, Minister of Gender Affairs in Sierra Leone, addressed this key meeting, held in Kenema City on November 26, 2021. The session concluded with partners, Paramount Chiefs and religious leaders signing a pledge condemning all cultural and traditional practices that are harmful to girls and committing to speaking out against all forms of gender-based violence, including child marriage. They also pledged to enforce laws, support victims and promote girls’ education at home, in communities and nationally to end child marriage in Sierra Leone. **This pledge underscores Save the Children’s commitment to a shared vision for success, with our community partners leading every step of the way.**

### January 2022

District kickoff meetings bring together community stakeholders such as Paramount Chiefs and the district representative of the national Inter-Religious Council.

### March 2022

Outreach accelerates with community meetings, a three-day staff workshop and stakeholder orientations. Participant feedback:

- Administrative clerk, Fowah, Kissi Teng chiefdom, Musa Conteh was happy to hear that his community was one of 15 selected for the project. *"I am very happy that such a project is being implemented in our community,"* he said. *"Seeing the Paramount Chief taking leadership in project activities will inspire other stakeholders to cooperate and take project work seriously."*
- Chairlady for Yelendu, Kumba Funjah also added that the Ending Child Marriage project was a good initiative, which she hoped will bring an end to child marriage and help girls learn.
- A community stakeholder stated, *"This project is our baby. We should become role models in our chiefdoms."* Regarding existing protection mechanisms, he said, *"Bye-laws are already in our own chiefdom. We just need to enforce them."*



ECM team meeting in Kailahun district, March 2022, including Paramount Chiefs, town chiefs, youth leaders and women leaders with the aim of increasing awareness and ownership of the project. *Save the Children photo*

## April 2022

Training of community champions gets under way, as stakeholders also devise chiefdom action plans to end child marriage. The Ending Child Marriage project team builds our locally tailored Social and Behavior Change strategy.

An important initial step in the Ending Child Marriage pilot is to create a Social and Behavior Change strategy that is specific to the region and communities in question, and that will inform and guide our activities over the next 18-24 months. In early April, we conducted research at the local level, in the Kailahun communities of Kissi Teng-Turadu and Mando-Njala. We interviewed community elders, young men and young women – including child brides and child mothers. Listening intently and engaging with these key stakeholders, our goal was to identify their thoughts and feelings around child marriage and teenage pregnancy; their preferred solutions to these issues; and the roles they could play. The results of this research will be synthesized over the next several months and will be ready to share in early summer.

## Challenges and Lessons Learned

Engaging with the First Lady and government Ministers is essential to achieving policy change. But with this high level of advocacy comes two significant risks:

1. The political agenda could change with upcoming elections in 2023. *Nonetheless, our objective to engage high-level influencers will remain steadfast. We will continue to work with decision makers like the Minister of Gender & Children's Affairs. We also aim to work closely with groups like Child Rights like Child Rights Coalition (CRC-SL) and Sierra Leone Adolescent Girls Network (SLAGN- which includes UNFPA) to ensure we have an alliance of powerful voices to address the issue.*
2. Relationships with high-level influencers are delicate and need close attention not only to maintain good working relations, but also to ensure that Save the Children is seen as a nonpartisan organization.

**Lesson:** Involving stakeholders in the selection of pilot participants encourages them to support the project and take ownership of its implementation.

## Looking Ahead

In the coming 6-8 months –

- 1) Save the Children will hold two important meetings – one at the national level and one at the Kailahun District level – with Members of Parliament, Paramount Chiefs, and other religious, traditional, and political leaders.
- 2) We will produce a final report on the outcomes of our Social and Behavior Change research (*our interviews and discussions with community elders, young men and young women*) that we will disseminate internally and externally to the Government of Sierra Leone, UN Agencies, partners, academic institutions, and our donors.
- 3) We will conduct a Political Economy Assessment, identifying enabling and obstructing political and economic forces to addressing the issue of child marriage and teenage pregnancy.
- 4) Informed by #s 2 and 3, we will develop and finalize our Social and Behavior Change strategy that will underpin all advocacy and community engagement activities.

## Thank You

We are grateful to our generous partners, including 100 Strong, for joining forces with Save the Children and the people of Kailahun to end child marriage in their communities. Together, we are building a model for change from the ground up – by listening, learning and implementing approaches that work best in each community. We look forward to your continuing support and engagement as our shared strategy comes to life and is implemented in Kailahun and, eventually, beyond!