



Girls First Fund

ANNUAL REPORT
2022-2023

SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES TO END CHILD MARRIAGE



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the Director

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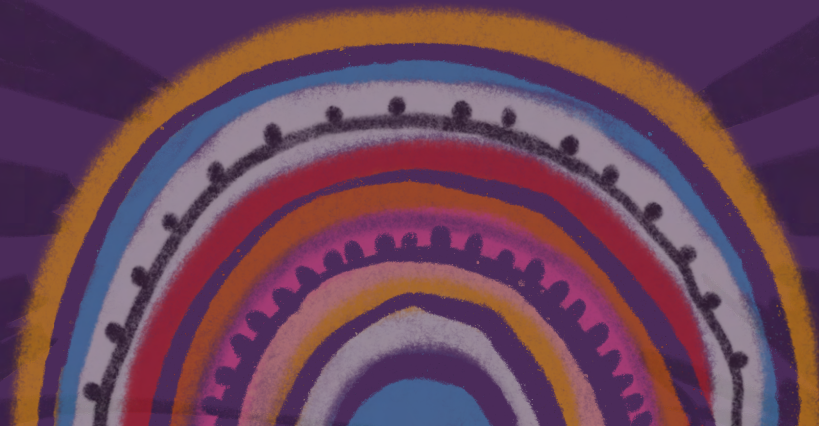
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Working with girls from different countries was an absolutely amazing and eye-opening experience. It brought a whole new dimension to our work together. Each girl brought her unique perspective, knowledge, and ideas to the table, enriching our discussions and problem-solving processes. The exchange of thoughts, stories, and experiences fostered a deep sense of understanding and appreciation for the challenges faced by girls in different parts of the world. It enabled me to break down stereotypes and misconceptions, replacing them with empathy and connections.

Girl Participant in the Changemakers Grant Council



Letter from the Director

After five years of grantmaking, the Girls First Fund (GFF) has been privileged to witness tremendous progress and incredible change. Our proof of concept is being validated in every region of the world, demonstrating that investments in community-based organizations (CBOs) can be a powerful driver of social norms change within communities. Our belief in the transformative and lasting power of community-based organizations as a central force in effective interventions to end child marriage is bearing out in practice. In July, in Kigali, we witnessed the monumental growth of the movement for gender equality and the power of collective action among girls and young women who are increasingly accessing spaces of power and decision making around their own futures.

At this point in our evolution, our learning mandate dictates that GFF grantee partners should be actively engaged in promoting girls' leadership and decision-making ability. Girls and their families should be increasingly aware that child marriage is a violation of rights; community and political leaders should be more engaged in preventing and responding to child marriage; and girls should be better able to access quality resources, education, and other services they need. All of this is happening! And each component is contributing to girls' increased agency and autonomy as well as shifts in attitudes, behaviors, and norms amongst girls' families and communities. Our partners set

out to reach more than 230,000 people (girls, boys, families, educators, and community leaders) to end child marriage and they have done so, leading us further on the path to more gender equitable societies.

We are engaging girls directly as agents of change, decision makers, and experts of their own experiences who have the capacity to shape and inform everything from strategies and programming to grant selection processes. We are striving to be more inclusive – of language, of experience, and of intersectional identities and looking at ways to engage girls at the center of communities and on the margins to drive change. We are witnessing the activation of adolescent girls and young women who are building collectives and safe spaces where they can learn about and assert their rights, educate and support their peers, and engage their communities and the wider ecosystem in advancing social norms change.

I'm inspired by the progress of girls like Snehal from India who joined our grantee partner Breakthrough Trust about three years ago. Snehal began learning about rights and entitlements, gender discrimination in society, the aspirations and dreams of girls, and more. Today, she speaks freely about her interests and works to make other people aware of social issues. To fulfill her dreams,

she convinced her family to send her to Padma College to study. This has done wonders for her self-confidence and deepened her desire to do something meaningful in life. Once shy, Snehal now encourages other girls to pursue their dreams and aspirations. This is why we exist!

Since the start of the Fund, we have raised nearly \$73m dollars and have already committed 90% of those funds totaling over \$66m through 2026. With those funds, we have supported a total of 177 organizations across our six focus countries. At the close of this fiscal year, we had invested more than \$37m in our funding-plus model that allocates both direct funding to grantees as well as additional on-the-ground programmatic support to deliver technical training and capacity strengthening, to help build connections with other organizations and networks, and to fuel learning efforts to track the tactics, interventions, and approaches that are taking root and demonstrating impact. I believe more strongly than ever in our collective power to create the future we want, and I thank you for being a part of our journey.

Fanta Touré Puri

OUR GRANTS **PORTFOLIO**



Change is *happening*...

The community-based and national organizations we support are increasingly confident, well-equipped, and better connected. In turn, they are demonstrating positive impacts at the level of girls, who are showing increased skills, agency, and leadership; and among community champions, who are using opportunities to influence others.

Many grantee partners report that child marriage and early unions are starting to be seen as a problem, where previously they were not. These topics are now being discussed more openly and critically amongst girls, families, teachers, and community leaders. Likewise, in many communities where grantee partners are

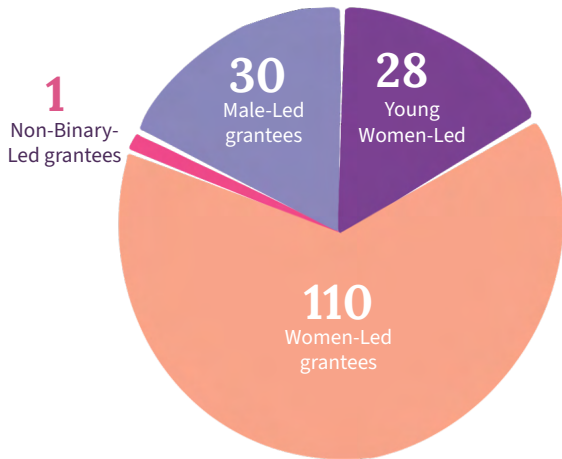
working, the parents of girls engaged in grantee programs increasingly value girls and understand the importance of continuing their education. We continue to build out each country's portfolio strategically, based on performance and opportunities, as well as gaps and challenges. We are doubling down on existing partners who now have the capacity to receive increased levels of funding and demonstrate more impact, while adding new organizations to the portfolio to fill strategic spaces.

As of June 30th, 2023, we were supporting 177 grantee partner organizations in eight (8) countries. This number will soon rise with the addition of 12 Changemakers grantees in seven (7) additional countries by the end of 2023.



82%

of organizations funded by GFF are led by girls or women



68%

of grantees are local CBOs who are based directly in the communities where they work

20%

are national organizations focused on community-driven solutions

12%

are sub-national organizations that are locally focused;

Average annual grant size for all grantees

\$26,580

Grant range

\$8,250 - \$62,000

46%

of reporting grantees indicated they joined a new network, coalition, or collective.

51%

of reporting grantees indicated that they have raised additional funding, totaling nearly \$4.6m.

94%

of grantees report receiving mentoring and accompaniment support that provided them with knowledge and/or an increased ability to advance their organization's operations and programs.

51%

of reporting grantees indicated they influenced state or national policy.

85%

of reporting grantees indicated they prevented instances of child marriage.



Girl-centered focus

For each grantee partner, we also track how girl-centered the work of the organization is, by understanding the specific commitments they make to girls and how they are engaged in their programming. When asking this question, we aim to understand how the organization involves girls in program design, decision-making, and organizational governance by making girls active participants in creating access to the knowledge, skills, information and services they need. We also ask whether the organization intentionally seeks girls' input and feedback in learning, monitoring and evaluation, and how the interventions and mission of the organization are focused on achieving positive outcomes with and for girls.

Our current ratings



Excellent: 53% of grantees



Acceptable: 41% of grantees



**Need support for improvement:
10% of grantees**

Other key focus areas

Our grantee partners are implementing complementary approaches that engage at all levels of the socio-ecological model (individual, family, community, and policy/institution). Alongside traditional actors and national organizations, we prioritize women- and young-women-led CBOs engaged in gender transformative interventions to end child marriage. This year, as part of our learning convening series, we began to more deeply dissect the tactics that grantee partners are employing to achieve their goals. We are focusing on questions like how grantees are disrupting and redistributing power; how they are building girls' agency and autonomy; how they are engaging men and boys; and how they are creating safe spaces for girls, among others.

Through our partnership with girl-centered, grassroots organizations, we are working with those affected by multiple layers of oppression based on race, caste, class, ability, ethnicity, sexuality, and gender identity and expression. Those most impacted by our grantee partners' work include those who identify as girls and young women, are married and unmarried, and who are from under-served communities in our focus countries. In addition to a focus on girls, grantee partners are engaged in multi-faceted programming, and we have highlighted their primary and secondary areas of focus below. These areas are fluid and often interlinked, and our partners' programming frequently extends into additional areas of focus.

Focus Area	Primary	Secondary	Total % of Grantees
Social & Behavior Change Communication	21%	67%	88%
Girls' Leadership	39%	36%	75%
Advocacy	12%	58%	70%
Sexual & Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)	8%	55%	63%
Education	10%	48%	58%
Economic Empowerment	8%	44%	52%
Safe Abortion	2%	12%	14%

COUNTRY HIGHLIGHTS

Since our inception, we have operated in six countries across Africa, Asia, and Latin America including: Democratic Republic of Congo, Niger, Uganda, Nepal, India and the Dominican Republic. By the end of 2023, in line with our plans for expansion, we will launch operations in Guinea and Guatemala, bringing our focus countries to a total of eight.



Uganda

In Uganda, 34% of girls are married before the age of 18 years, which is the minimum legal age of marriage in the country. Child marriage is driven by factors including poverty and lack of access to education and other opportunities for girls, intergenerational and transactional relationships, and displacement as a result of conflict, among others.

The National Strategy to End Child Marriage is a holistic, comprehensive framework that reflects the global and national commitment of the Ugandan government to end the practice of child marriage and other forms of violence against girls including teenage pregnancy. The government has also established a toll-free child helpline to respond to child abuse and gender-based violence, including child marriage.

Our Year in Figures

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Grantee Partners

\$1,530,800

2022-2024 investment

22

Grantees received additional outside funding

\$814,629

Funds committed for fiscal year

July 2022 – June 2023

Grantee Spotlight

Since 2017, Muslim Teen Mothers Upraising Against Forced Early Marriages, Marginalization and Extremism (MUTMUA-IFEME) has been working to eliminate child marriages in the Muslim community of Kawempe and Rubaga divisions in Kampala, Uganda. They collaborate with local government, traditional, and religious leaders, and community members to advocate for changes to social norms and practices that perpetuate inequality and child marriage.

Masiko* was married off at an early age and gave birth to her first child at the age of 13 years. Shortly after, her husband died, and she was left a widow and single mother to her child. With no formal education, Masiko faced several challenges until she started participating in the economic empowerment activities run by MUTMUA-IFEME.

Through this program, she was trained in tailoring and taught how to make liquid soap. She was able to purchase a sewing machine and has started her own business, making and selling school uniforms and soap, and operating a popcorn stand. From the proceeds of her different businesses, she purchased land and built a house which is nearly completed. In addition to this personal and entrepreneurial growth, Masiko has progressed to become the deputy CEO of MUTMUA-IFEME.

**Name has been changed to protect her identity*



Niger

In Niger, 76% of girls are married before their 18th birthday, and 28% are married before the age of 15 years. The country is known to have the highest prevalence of child marriage in the world, with a minimum legal age of marriage of 15 years for girls and 18 years for boys. There is no law against child marriage at the national level; however, there is a National Action Plan to End Child Marriage, as well as several other relevant policy frameworks and structures including the Child Protection Committees. Child marriage is driven by poverty and economic vulnerability of families, poor access to education especially in rural communities, lack of access to quality SRHR services, high social pressure for marriage within the family and community, as well as strong religious influence in the country.

In the communities where our grantee partners work, there have been important shifts in social norms related to child marriage and gender equality, in general. Where previously, child marriage was considered a normal practice, we are now documenting cases of families and parents building their understanding of the negative impact of the practice on girls.

With increased awareness, more women are reporting cases of planned or already conducted child marriages in their homes and communities. Remarkably, some traditional and religious leaders now denounce the practice and influence one another to refuse officiating child marriages. Our grantee partners are building strategic alliances with these leaders, girls, families, communities, and the child protection committees at various levels to sustain these movements towards ending child marriage.

Our Year in Figures

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Grantee Partners

6

Grantees received additional outside funding

\$1,650,600

2022-2024 investment

\$883,132

Funds committed for fiscal year
July 2022 – June 2023

Grantee Spotlight

Promotion de l'Entreprenariat Jeunesse et du Leadership Féminin (PEJELF) is a women-led, community-based organization in Niger. PEJELF promotes girls' and women's rights in the Nigerien society, a context where harmful gender norms and power constructs favoring men over women exist.

Najaah* is 19 years-old, and she is a student at the public high school in Kollo, Niger. Since 2019, she has been an active participant in a project implemented by PEJELF. Through the organization's multiple capacity development programs, Najaah built her leadership skills and became the President of the PEJELF-supported Adolescent Girls' Club in 2021.

This experience and her desire to learn more from the staff of the organization motivated her to participate voluntarily in more PEJELF activities. In 2022, she became a member of the organization, and given her proven skills and dedication to the work, she was appointed to the post of treasurer by the General Assembly this year. Najaah is the first adolescent and first female treasurer of PEJELF since the founding of the organization in 2012. Her story is a powerful example of the importance of supporting adolescent girls to access practical leadership opportunities within our grantee partner organizations and in their wider community.

**Name has been changed to protect her identity*



Nepal

Nepal has the third-highest prevalence of child marriage in Asia, with 41% of women aged 20 to 24 years married before they turn 18. Nepal also ranks in the top 10 countries for the prevalence of child marriage among boys. In Nepal, child marriage is driven by various factors including poverty, limited access to SRHR education and services, patriarchal norms like the practice of dowry, and cross-border migrations.

As part of its commitment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the country aims to end child marriage by 2030, with the government creating a national strategy that provides an overarching framework to achieve this goal. This complements strategies and plans at the provincial level, also developed to protect girls from child marriage and other harmful practices. Child marriage is also considered a crime under Nepal's laws; however, the implementation of these laws remains weak except in cases where there is pressure on the law enforcement agents.

Grantee Spotlight

Our grantee partner LIFE Nepal organized the provincial Madhesh Girls' Summit 2023 in coordination with the Ministry of Women, Children, Youth and Sports (MoWCYS) in Madhesh Province. The summit aimed to unite the various stakeholders working to advance the rights of women and girls to formulate a declaration on ending child marriage in the province. It also sought to create space for sensitization on child marriage, especially through the sharing of stories and experiences by more than 100 girl delegates at the summit.

At the end of the summit, a six-point declaration to end child marriage was developed and adopted by the delegates. The declaration comprised appreciation for the Chief Minister of Madhesh Province's declaration of April 30th as an annual day against child marriage; a promise to further strengthen the "Beti Padhau-Beti Bachau" campaign, expand it to local level, and lobby to prioritize ending child marriage; and a commitment to prioritize the implementation of needed programs at both local and provincial levels to end gender discrimination and gender-based violence.

The delegates also committed to prioritizing access to girls' education, including completion of higher education; to ensuring the active participation of girls in decision-making processes which directly or indirectly affect their lives; as well as promoting and respecting the positive role of the family and community in promoting and protecting the rights of girls.

On receiving the girls' declaration, the provincial government of Madhesh Province announced the development of a strategic plan to end child marriage in the province by 2030, in line with the SDGs.

Our Year in Figures

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Grantee Partners

\$1,488,500

2022-2024 investment

17

Grantees received additional outside funding

\$772,007

Funds committed for fiscal year
July 2022 – June 2023



India

In India, 23.3% of girls are married before they turn 18 years. The country's Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2006 sets the minimum legal age of marriage at 18 years for girls and 21 years for boys. Our operations in India are mainly focused in the state of Jharkhand, which has a state action plan to end child marriage. Jharkhand state has the fourth-highest prevalence of child marriage in India with a current prevalence rate of 32.2%.

In India, we have observed significant growth in feminist and gender transformative thinking and approaches among several grantee partners. Historically, non-profit organizations in India have been male-led. Over the years, many women have been breaking away from these large organizations where they were usually program staff and not leaders. They are forming their own organizations focusing on women's empowerment issues. This has led to important issues like violence against women and girls, gender discrimination, and injustice being given more importance. We are also seeing girls joining or connecting with our grantee partners, building their skills, and taking up leadership roles in these organizations.

Our Year in Figures

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Grantee Partners

15

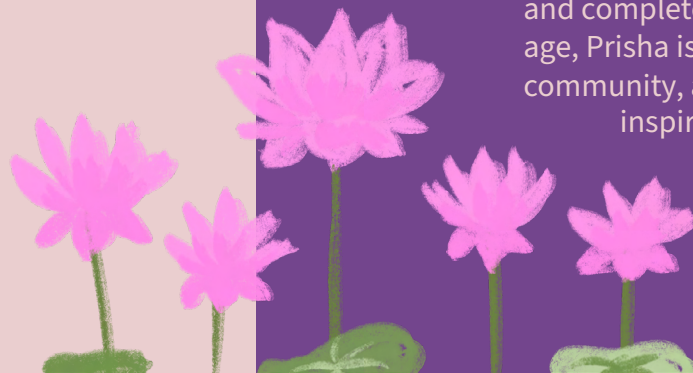
Grantees received additional outside funding

\$1,684,700

2022-2024 investment

\$840,847

Funds committed for fiscal year
July 2022 – June 2023



Grantee Spotlight

Ashray is a women-led, community-based organization in Deoghar, Jharkhand. The organization works with underprivileged communities including Muslim and Scheduled Caste communities, as part of their vision for social justice, gender equity, and livelihood opportunities.

Prisha* is a 17-year-old girl from Pipra village in the Deoghar district, which has one of the highest percentages of child marriage in the state. Growing up, she faced pressure from her family and relatives to get married, but she continued to resist this pressure. Prisha wanted to go to school.

She connected with Ashray, where she participated in their programs and began learning about the harmful consequences of child marriage. With this new knowledge and her desire to get an education, Prisha used her leadership skills to convince her family and consequently stop her planned marriage.

Today, Prisha leads the Kishori adolescent girls' group of the organization and is working to connect the girls in her village to education opportunities. She talks to them about her progress in school and has succeeded in supporting adolescent girls who had left school to re-enroll and complete their education. At such a young age, Prisha is already a role model for girls in her community, and she is often cited as their inspiration for refusing to marry early.

**Name has been changed to protect her identity*

Dominican Republic

The Dominican Republic is ranked as the country with the highest prevalence of child marriage and early unions in the Latin America and Caribbean region. 36% of girls are married before the age of 18 years. The country has a law banning child marriage which also establishes the age of consent at 18 years, a positive advancement from past reality where 15-year-old girls could consent to marriage, with their parents' permission. Informal unions, where girls and adolescents move in with men or boys, are also common. This often leaves them in vulnerable situations with limited legal protection.

In the Dominican Republic, child marriage is one of the many manifestations of gender inequality, which is also the foundation of gender and social roles. When these gender roles intersect with social issues like poverty, violence and control, child marriage becomes a coping mechanism for girls and their families. Intra-family violence and femicide are common, and many girls enter child marriages/early unions to escape violence, social and sexual control at home. Adolescent girls also face difficulties in accessing contraception and sex education.

Our Year in Figures

27

Grantee Partners

12

Grantees received additional outside funding

\$1,415,800

2022-2024 investment

\$703,483

Funds committed for fiscal year
July 2022 – June 2023



Grantee Spotlight

Mariposa Foundation has been exemplary in their approach to centering girls' leadership and agency in their programming. One of their key interventions is supporting girls to access early education and other useful resources, while gaining life skills. Many of these girls become first generation graduates in their families. The organization also supports girls to access higher education, including in universities in the USA.

Juana* is 11 years-old and was inspired by her sister to join the Mariposa Foundation. Before joining the organization, she attended public school and when she wasn't in class, she would be responsible for the household chores. A few years later, she enrolled in a private school and combines the formal education she receives there with her activities at Mariposa.

At the organization, she has learned how to read, write, and swim. She is currently in a coding class where she is learning how to write her own code and develop her typing skills. This year, she has also taken courses in ocean conservation, cooking, and dance. Mariposa also provides piano lessons for her, and she is preparing for her first recital. Juana dreams of travelling the world to learn about other cultures and discover the many opportunities the world has to offer. The broad palette of learning she has at Mariposa provides a solid foundation for this dream.

**Name has been changed to protect her identity*

Democratic Republic of Congo

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), 37% of girls are married before the age of 18. The country has a national action plan to end child marriage with key pillars including support for at-risk children, access to quality social services, awareness-raising on the harmful effects of child marriage, improved political and legal governance mechanisms, and research to support evidence-based interventions.

The military conflict in eastern DRC has increased the incidence of child marriage by creating a climate where sexual violence is widespread, and there is limited rule of law and impunity for perpetrators. An estimated 200,000 girls and women have experienced sexual violence due to war, and are often left with devastating health complications, stigmatized and rejected by their families. High levels of poverty and the practice of bride price payments also contribute to high child marriage rates in DRC, as well as family debt whereby girls become part of the financial settlement. Informal marriages and polygamy are two practices that also continue to impact the landscape of child marriage in the country.

The DRC portfolio fell under the “humanitarian” typology for GFF, and as such, provided an important opportunity to learn what ending child marriage looks like in an emergency context. Our partners use various strategies including strengthening girls’ leadership, promoting access to sexual and reproductive rights including access to safe abortions, behavior change communication, and economic empowerment. They also work directly with communities affected by conflict, including displaced people, refugees, and ethnic minorities.

Our Year in Figures

22

Grantee Partners

3

Grantees received additional outside funding

\$866,468

Funds committed for fiscal year July 2022 – June 2023

\$492,600

across 14 grantees
2022-2023 Investment

\$718,800

across 8 grantees
2022-2024 Investment



New strategic direction

In 2022, after a substantive review and deliberation, we embarked on a journey to have a more focused presence in the DRC. This decision was informed by the challenges associated with having multiple partners across two provinces (Tanganyika and Haut Katanga), in a context that has serious logistical and operational constraints.

We informed our partners in Tanganyika of the decision to transition out over a period of one year. We supplemented their regular grant with an additional 15% of their annual budget to support organizational strengthening for continued impact after the end of our collaboration. We have also connected seven of the organizations with other funders, creating opportunities for them to receive additional support from our collaborators.

As part of the process, we hosted a convening of all grantee partners in DRC, creating space for conversation on the experience, achievements and lessons learnt from our collaboration. The 14 partners we are sunsetting indicate that they are now part of a movement in the country that has grown significantly with our support. They have committed to building a network

of their organizations in the region, with the aim of combining human, financial and intellectual resources to advocate collectively against child marriage and ensure its inclusion in the country's development agenda.

Our conversations confirmed the changes that grantees have achieved in their communities over the years of our collaboration. They have successfully supported children to enroll and stay in school; provided life skills training for girls as young as 12 years-old; facilitated access to contraception for girls at risk of marriage; and have raised awareness in communities, leading to increased understanding of child marriage as a representation of gender inequality. And, they have made this progress in the face of significant challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic and its resultant socio-economic crisis, closure of borders leading to reduced cross-border trade for highly dependent communities, as well as limited access to essential food supplies. Due to school closures for extended periods, many girls, including those connected to our grantee partner organizations, were exposed to various forms of violence.

When we began working in DRC, we found partner organizations that thought child marriage was an unassailable giant. Five of them had never received any prior funding and seven of them were only receiving funding from us. Today, we are proud to see organizations that have become the benchmark for our collective cause to end child marriage, who have built their systems and structures, who have defined their approaches and goals, and have learnt from our journey together... just as we have. We are confident that they will continue to lead change in their communities, placing girls at the heart of their organizations, and supporting them to lead.

EXPANDING
INTO **NEW**
HORIZONS



This year, in line with plans to expand our work to support more community-based organizations to end child marriage, we have added Guinea and Guatemala to our list of focus countries. A great part of this year has been dedicated to setting up structures, facilitating recruitment of program advisors, and completing scoping activities to elaborate our strategy in these two countries. Similarly, this year saw the launch of our exciting new global mechanism called Changemakers which will support community-based organizations outside our primary focus countries who are leading change and influencing communities to end child marriage.

Guinea

Located in West Africa, Guinea records a high rate of child marriage, with 46% of girls getting married before the age of 18. The practice is driven by various factors including poverty, culture and religion, limited access to basic services for girls and women, as well as related harmful practices. However, the country has a strong legal and policy framework to protect girls and end child marriage. The National Strategic Plan to Promote the Abandonment of Child Marriage 2021-2025 aims to reduce the prevalence rate by 20 percentage points in the next 3 years, in line with the objectives of the SDGs.

There is also a good ecosystem of partners at various levels supporting girls' access to education, SRHR and economic opportunities. There is significant momentum in Guinea to end gender-based violence, and the voice of young women is loud and clear, as they lay claim to their rights to pursue better alternatives to marriage, while striving to maintain strong ties with their communities.

We are optimistic and incredibly excited about the possibility of tipping the scales towards eliminating child marriage alongside the robust existing movement and critical government engagement. We hope to amplify the voice of youth and girls who are demanding change and engage them in validating our strategy and supporting our grantmaking.

Guatemala

In Guatemala, 30% of girls are married before they turn 18. With most marriages determined to be informal unions, the country records one of the highest prevalence rates of child marriage in the Latin American and Caribbean region, and a teenage fertility rate that also exceeds the regional average. This is driven by poverty, adolescent pregnancy, low rates of girls' education mainly at the high school level, gang violence, and lack of employment, among others. In 2017, the country banned marriages for persons under the age of 18 years.

Guatemala has made some progress in creating public policies to prevent and eradicate

violence against women, adolescent girls and young women. However, significant gaps have persisted in their implementation, limiting the impact of these policies and the possibility of ensuring opportunities for all girls. The country has recently witnessed a historic victory of a progressive presidential candidate in an otherwise conservative environment. This change creates more space for the work of anti-child marriage activists and organizations seeking equality and choice. We hope that this will set the stage to enable and embolden an environment that is supportive of the rights of women and girls.

Our plan is to build our strategy in a consultative and inclusive way with a focus on supporting marginalized populations and groups and working in close partnership with the national chapter of Girls Not Brides. Increasing the visibility of child marriage as an issue is critical, and we are thrilled to invest in Guatemala to contribute to achieving their development goals despite the challenges that the country faces, such as the impact of the pandemic, the increase in irregular migration, the risk of natural disasters, and the effects of climate change.

Changemakers

In 2022, we started working on Changemakers, our new global grantmaking program to scale up successful approaches to end child marriage across the global majority with 3-year grants of \$25,000 to \$100,000. Eleven girls between the ages of 16 and 25, from the 3 regions we work in (Latin America, Africa and Asia) were nominated by our Program Advisors and external partners to join our Changemakers Council, as part of our co-creation process for the program.

Following an inception meeting with the Council in July 2022, the co-design and grantee partner selection process was facilitated virtually over Zoom between January and June 2023. To promote inclusivity and support girls from different countries to actively participate in the discussions, we worked with a Language Justice team to facilitate translation and interpretation during each engagement.

The girls worked together, through facilitated conversations, to establish the criteria for selecting the focus countries for the Changemakers program. They had the opportunity to lean on their lived experiences, knowledge gained from our initial knowledge exchange meetings, and their ideas for ending child marriage during this decision-making process. For some of the girls, the prevalence of child marriage in a particular country was a

determining factor. For others, countries with low resources for work to end child marriage were a priority. Some of the girls were also very familiar with their regional context, and this guided their interests. For example, the girls from Niger were interested in Mali because they knew of girls who had escaped child marriage there by migrating to Niger.

Through the process the girls identified key thematic areas and approaches including mentorship, freedom of expression, and the creation of safe spaces. They were keen to recommend organizations with built-in support systems to address mental health and emotional support which they considered crucial to protecting girls and preventing child marriage. The girls recognized the significance of role models, support systems, and girls' leadership as important strategies to address child marriage.

There was also great consideration for programs that support parents, family members and the wider community to create enabling environments for girls, including areas in which child marriage is being addressed. There was a clear preference for educating these groups of powerholders on the rights and choices of their daughters and the girls in their communities, as opposed to punitive action against them.

The Council developed the criteria for the selection of the final seven countries for the Changemakers program, namely: Pakistan, Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Mali, Nigeria, Haiti, and Mexico. We then solicited recommendations of organizations in these countries from peer grant makers, with each recommendation reviewed, discussed, and evaluated by the girls in the Council. At the end of the process, the girls selected 12 organizations to receive annual grants of \$25,000 - \$100,000 for up to three years. These organizations will receive their first set of grants by the end of 2023.



LEARNING INTO LEARNING

*Over the past year, we have created several opportunities to collectively reflect on and analyse the data collected from and by our grantee partners, as well as to pull together the wealth of knowledge within the team. This year, we highlight some of the key insights around our grantee partners, the **key tactics for gender transformative change**, their **areas of focus**, as well as some reflections on our **Funding-plus model**. We also share how we'll be leaning into learning in the coming year.*



Areas of Focus

While our grantee partners indicate primary and secondary areas of focus in their annual updates, they have a multitude of focus areas/entry points, depending on the dynamics within a specific community as well as the beliefs and theories regarding change that inform their approach. In the analysis of their reports over the past year, some areas of focus have emerged prominently across our partners: **advancing girls' education; fostering girls' economic empowerment; and providing SRHR information and services.**

Advancing Girls' Education

Access to education for girls is one of the most powerful ways to enhance their skills and opportunities, break the cycle of poverty and violence, promote gender equality, and delay the age of and/or reduce child marriage. However, millions of girls across our focus countries are out of school. The strong correlation between being out of school and being married as a child warrants the high prioritization of supporting girls' access to education as a strategy to end child marriage. Our grantee partners have primarily employed tactics that aim to keep girls in school, re-enroll those who have dropped out, and/or engage girls in learning and social activities outside of school and during school closures. We highlight some of the successful strategies in advancing girls' education to counter child marriage.

Improving menstrual health and hygiene to keep girls in school

Our partners have focused on normalizing menstruation and improving menstrual hygiene facilities and supplies to ensure that girls do not lose access to school. For example, in Nepal, our partners have challenged a traditional practice of physically isolating women and girls during their menstruation. Several Nepal-based grantee partners have reported reductions in the practice, increased access to sanitary pads in schools, and increasing provision of separate toilets for girls and women at school.

Giving pregnant, parenting, married and other girls the opportunity for schooling

In response to the high rates of out-of-school girls, several grantee partners have been working to ensure that girls – married or unmarried, pregnant, parenting, or not – are able to stay in and/or return to school. They have done this through case management approaches, working directly with girls, their families and school administrators to help girls re-enroll and/or provide them with economic, in-kind, or tutoring support. They also sensitize and educate parents, teachers, school administrators, and policymakers about the harms of stigmatizing pregnant, parenting, or married girls; the benefits of girls' education; and the harms of child marriage.

Supporting girls with assets and skills

Millions of girls in our focus countries are out of school. Even when they are in school, girls are not necessarily learning the skills and assets they need to thrive, including the skills that will help them contribute to more gender equitable societies. Our grantee partners are directly addressing this issue by providing educational training as well as skills and activities that have traditionally been oriented towards boys such as Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, as well as engagement in sports and outdoor activities.

Fostering Girls' Economic Empowerment

Although education and economic empowerment are closely linked, our grantee partners place particular emphasis on economic empowerment as a way of showing girls and their families that they have worth beyond their expected roles as wife, mother, and homemaker. This is specifically because financial independence can increase girls' influence and authority in their families and communities. Activities geared towards fostering girl's economic empowerment range from vocational skills, entrepreneurship training, seed money for the start-up of small businesses, in-kind support for income generating activities, engagement with Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) and other savings groups, as well as linkages with credit, among other activities.

Providing SRHR Information and Services

In many contexts, child marriage is driven by a lack of information and limited access to SRHR services. Many grantee partners recognize this; however, few grantee partners identified SRHR as a priority in their programming, and fewer still demonstrated success in increasing adolescents' access to SRHR services. On average across countries, only 34% reported increasing access to SRHR education, and 26% reported increasing access to SRHR services. These findings generally align with the primary strategies being employed by the grantee partners, which lean more heavily towards youth education, girls' leadership, advocacy, as well as social and behavior change.

Sharing the experiences and strategies of those who are prioritizing SRHR with other partners working in more conservative contexts may be beneficial as they could learn how to integrate topics related to SRHR into their programming. For example, **Fundación Paso a Paso con los Niños** in the Dominican Republic, pairs SRHR education with offerings that are generally more accepted, such as vocational skills building, which has allowed them to obtain the necessary buy-in and support from key stakeholders for reaching adolescent girls. In Uganda, **Access Youth Initiative Uganda** trains teachers to provide comprehensive sexuality education and to refer young people to SRHR services.



Tactics for Gender Transformative Change

Our grantee partners create, use and adapt a variety of tactics to effect gender transformative change. Through an internal team reflection, we have started to identify some of these tactics.

Building Girls' Agency and Autonomy

At the core of the work of our partners lie efforts to challenge perceptions and beliefs about girls and girlhood, beliefs held within patriarchal societies, which have in turn become limiting beliefs that girls hold about themselves. Largely through safe spaces, our grantee partners focus on developing the leadership skills of girls, increasing their self-esteem and confidence, improving their communication and negotiation skills, and building greater awareness of social and political issues. They also provide training and practical experience in decision-making, giving girls power to make decisions within their organizations - including on partners' programming and budgets. Girls are also supported to network and use their voice in government, school, and decision-making spaces, all of which can help prepare participants for future leadership roles in their communities and careers.

This work is rooted in the desire to **disrupt and redistribute power**. Girls who participate in leadership training programs that focus on action and advocacy have significant opportunities to apply their newly acquired skills and self-confidence. They are doing so by negotiating

with parents, drafting policy recommendations, speaking in public, meeting with government officials and advocating for local and national policies that promote girls' rights. These opportunities do not only develop the girls' practical skills and self-confidence; they also expand their networks and have started to change the perception of girls among community leaders, officials, and themselves.

Feminist Approach to Technology (FAT) in India is a network of collectives led by young women that work together to support girls as feminist leaders, including through exposure to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Through the platforms of STEM skill-building and collective action, FAT supports girls and women to gain the agency they need to achieve sustainable and gender equitable changes in their lives and communities. Their skills development initiatives, girls' collectivization activities, and peer support groups have contributed to helping participating girls to become more confident and more socially aware. Their Tech Girls report being able to carve out an identity and space for themselves, for the first time ever. They are participating in family and community conversations, taking decisions, and asserting their agency. In turn, traditional

understanding of gender roles is being questioned and attitudes about child marriage are changing in the girls' communities.

Girls participating in groups supported by **Hamro Prayas in Nepal** have also gained important knowledge and confidence and are now speaking more openly with their parents about the importance of education and remaining unmarried as children. They have started to lead advocacy efforts against child marriage in their schools and communities and are taking the lead in various other social activities. Women in the Muslim community where Hamro Prayas works, are typically not permitted to work outside the home.

One of the young women engaged in Hamro Prayas programming, Idha,* has become an example in her community by challenging traditional perceptions about child marriage and the role of women and girls in society. In the local elections held in May 2022, Idha was elected as a temporary police officer, a job not typically held by women. She worked outside her home for two months while fulfilling her responsibilities in this new role. Her family, who was familiar with and supportive of Idha's training, supported her despite community pushback. Idha's leadership, the respect she gained as a police officer, and her ability to earn money for her family have spurred more positive attitudes toward girls in her Muslim community, and many community members have begun to send their daughters to school.

*Name has been changed to protect her identity

Supporting Girls' Collective Power

As grantee partners bring girls together in safe spaces and for other activities, they are breaking girls' isolation, enabling them to relax, form friendships, as well as share challenges and dreams. Our partners' initiatives range from forming girls' clubs, savings groups, peer networks and supporting leadership and advocacy-oriented collectives.

These initiatives have created opportunities for girls to connect, build a strong sense of community and solidarity, deepen their understanding of their rights, explore the value of teamwork, nurture their confidence to express themselves, and build awareness of their individual and collective power.



With our support, **Confederación Nacional de Mujeres del Campo (CONAMUCA) in the Dominican Republic** has established a girl-led network against child marriage of over 1,000 girl members. Through the network, girls are taught to challenge social norms contributing to gender-based violence, and to analyze public policies using appropriate tools. They have engaged in leadership roles and lead discussions on gender within their communities. In addition, they have become more vocal in defending their rights and participating in decision-making processes. The program has enabled girls to communicate more openly with family and friends, including on gender-related topics.

Association for Advocacy and Legal Initiatives Trust (AALI), a legal aid organization in India, trained young women who intervened in cases of child marriage and held meetings with government and non-government leaders, enlisting them in the fight to eradicate child marriage. These young women leaders experienced the importance of activity-based learning and advocacy first-hand, and they now use it as a tool for raising awareness during community interventions and engagements.

Fundación de Salvación M.E.N.A in the Dominican Republic reported that girls in their groups developed and implemented a social media campaign that called out schools for expelling pregnant girls. The campaign was intended to build awareness about the importance of school retention for girls, including pregnant girls, using messages like “No me eches, merezco una oportunidad” (Don’t kick me out, I deserve an opportunity).

Changing Norms around Gender Roles

“By confronting harmful gender and social norms, we strive to promote gender equality and enable girls to pursue their aspirations. Our decision to address these specific issues stems from a commitment to human rights and the belief that every individual, regardless of their gender, should have equal opportunities and freedoms. We recognize that sustainable development and the well-being of communities are intrinsically linked to gender equality, and by challenging harmful norms, we contribute to creating a more inclusive and just society for all.”

- Association for Advocacy of Legal Initiatives

Ending child marriage is inseparable from the work of changing how girls (and women) are perceived and valued in societies. In addition, focusing solely on initiatives centered on girls, places the burden of change on only girls and fails to recognize that the contexts that girls live in need to be transformed.

Our grantees build awareness about gender roles and girls' rights through **sensitization activities** with girls' groups; create opportunities for boys and girls to interact and **collectively understand and push norms** around gender roles; and share **role models** of women in careers considered to be for men. In addition, grantee partners use **mass media** to raise awareness amongst a large audience about the harmful effects of child marriage and the importance of girls' education,

health and rights. These conversations spark **public debates**, as well as discussions in families and communities about issues often considered taboo or difficult to raise, representing a **key way to disrupt norms**. Furthermore, in the communities where they work, our grantee partners **facilitate discussions** with parents, community stakeholders, and **decision makers** to reflect on and build awareness around the harms of rigid gender roles. In several communities, these key stakeholders are **religious leaders** who hold significant power, particularly with regards to shifting deeply held beliefs and practices.

This work also includes **engaging men and boys** in efforts to end child marriage, promote more gender-equitable relationships, prevent gender-based violence, and create a more supportive

environment for girls to exercise their rights. Grantee partners have facilitated workshops and discussions with boys on SRHR, family planning, and norms around the inequities of rigid gender roles. They have held public debates with boys, religious and traditional leaders, speaking on positive masculinities. They have also collaborated with fathers, brothers, husbands, boda boda (motor bicycle) drivers, and male religious leaders to raise awareness about the harms of child marriage.

Sparking Meaningful Change

Our analysis of grantee partner reports found that the greatest successes reported by grantee partners are in the areas of changing community attitudes related to gender norms, with 87% of reports across the six countries indicating success in this area. Seventy-eight (78%) percent of reports indicated success in changing the behaviors of girls, such as seeing them become peer leaders, accessing contraception, reporting GBV, or re-enrolling in school. And 68% of grantee partner reports indicated success in shifting girls' attitudes, including, for example, about their belief in the ability to say no to marriage or sex, have dreams for a different life, or believe that gender roles should be more equitable.

We have observed several core shifts and changes based on our analysis and feedback we receive from grantee partners.

Increased skills, agency and leadership

Girls who participate in our grantee partners' initiatives show increased skills, agency, and in some instances, leadership. They are actively involved in shaping the work of partners and have started to individually and collectively resist and initiate their own activities in the fight to end child marriage and advance gender equality.

Changing community attitudes and norms

There have been increased public denunciations of child marriage by girls, parents, and community leaders. More and more, child marriage and early unions are seen as problematic and there is increased open and critical discussions on child marriage.

Reductions in child marriages

85% of our grantee partners have reported specific instances of child marriage having been prevented, nullified, or annulled because of their work. These instances add up to hundreds of child marriages averted across the reports we have reviewed.



What we are learning about our model

Some of the key learnings and stories we've heard from partners have confirmed the assumptions and deeply held beliefs that form the foundation of our funding-plus model. We are learning that...

...core, flexible and multi-year funding is critical.

Core and flexible funding have been critical in supporting our grantee partners to allocate sufficient funding to their operational costs while being responsive to their communities and their changing contexts. The importance of having funding that is not restrictive has been particularly evident in the past few years as grantee partners adjusted their planned activities to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and its socio-economic after-effects. Having our multi-year funding has enabled them to design longer term programs as opposed to one-off interventions. For example, they have created alternative education centers for out-of-school girls; they are also challenging girls' isolation through holiday sports, academic programs and activities to support girls in transitioning back to school, including with the provision of childcare, food, and mental healthcare.

... we must continue to plant seeds for collective action.

"One of the most important aspects of this grant, besides the funding, is being part of a growing network within the Dominican Republic, Latin America, and ultimately the world. The Girls First Fund has allowed us to amplify our voices and has installed pride in our organization." - Mariposa Foundation

Funding a large number of organizations in a single country and bringing them together to connect and learn from one another has created a support system among partners, as well as opportunities for collective action. Through online and in-person spaces, such as learning convenings, our grantee partners have strengthened their relationships with one another over the past four years. These connections have led to self-organized trainings to share knowledge and tips on advocacy among partners. Grantee partners have also acted as references for one another to receive additional funding and have conducted local and national level advocacy initiatives together.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, **Ligue de la Zone Afrique pour la Défense des Droits des Enfants et Elèves** collaborated with other GFF grantee partners in advocacy activities that allowed them to establish mechanisms for reporting cases of sexual violence in schools, and for referring survivors to appropriate care and support.

Fundación Desarrollo Integral Manos Anaranjadas and Mujeres en Desarrollo Dominicana began working with Girls Not Brides, with the goal of creating the Dominican Republic's first coalition in response to early unions and child marriage. The outcome was the creation of the **Coalición Popular en respuesta a los MIUTF en República Dominicana** (the People's Coalition in Response to Child Marriage and Early and Forced Unions in the Dominican Republic).



... beyond grants, we continue to support capacity strengthening through our funding-plus model.

94% of our grantee partners reported that they have received training or mentoring support from GFF in the last 12 months and that this support provided them with knowledge and/or an increased ability to advance their organization's operations and programs.

Flexible funding to CBOs is growing but remains limited for many. For some grantees, we may be their only funder, for others with more institutional funding, our grant is often one of the few or sole flexible funding they have, and therefore used to supplement their core budget. These patterns leave very little for partners to allocate to their self-identified capacity strengthening needs. In recognition of this, we include funding for capacity strengthening in the budget for each country for learning visits and identified technical and training

needs. As the capacity of CBOs is built, they have the capacity to access more funding.

This year alone, 51% of GFF grantees were able to access new funding totaling nearly \$4.6m.

Dominican Republic-based grantee partner, **Nucleo de Apoyo a la Mujer** reports that the GFF-sponsored workshop “How to create a culture of well-being and self-care” was very useful for their organization, as it allowed them to reflect on their internal policies surrounding self-care, as well as the collective well-being and mental health of their staff.

In Nepal, our organizational development training helped **Parikalpana** to better address child rights, child protection, and child participation, while financial management training helped **SAMABIKAS** and **Soiya Mahila Swabalambi Sanstha** to improve their financial administration and reporting, and their account keeping, documentation, and reporting.

In Uganda, training on institutional governance and sustainability helped **Resilient Women's Organization** to review terms for their Board of Directors and adjust their resource mobilization strategies. Field support visits by our staff provided our grantee partners the opportunities for in depth engagement on ways to improve programmatic work, institutional positioning, and organizational approaches.

Our learning agenda going forward

From inception, learning has been a priority for us, not as an adjunct process, but one built into our funding-plus model as a strategy to ensure that we and our partners continue to evolve and adapt as needed in the work we do to end child marriage.

We continue to allocate meaningful resources to convene learning spaces, and regular visits to partners on an annual basis. This has been in recognition that our work and that of our partners is reliant on unearthing information and generating insights from and with those doing the work and the communities they live and operate in.

Building on our Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) strategy, we finalized and are now in the process of rolling out our learning agenda and questions – using in person learning convenings to refine our understanding of the gender transformative approaches our grantee partners use, their contexts, and their understandings of change. In addition, this year, we are conducting an evaluation of grantee interventions in Niger, the Dominican Republic, and India to inform our strategy going forward.

External evaluation of GFF grantee partner interventions in Niger, Dominican Republic and India

Since 2020, we have worked with Population Council on a multi-country study, aimed at exploring our grounding belief that Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) play a unique role in creating lasting change and addressing the root causes of child marriage.

The central question guiding this work is ***“Do girls in communities taking part in GFF partners’ interventions experience better outcomes than girls in communities that are not participating?”*** The study examines key areas of interest to us and the CBOs that we fund and assesses the impact of the CBOs’ programs on intermediary outcomes like agency, self-efficacy, educational aspirations, and gender-equitable attitudes. For example, in all three countries, the study explores girls’ school enrolment data, the proportion of married girls in intervention communities in comparison to where our partners are not working, as well as perception data, for example: girls’ perceptions on education, marriage and the various initiatives girls have been working on.

This mixed methods study surveyed 3,451 girls, included conducting stakeholder mapping with girls, focus group discussions with married and unmarried girls, focus group discussions with mothers and fathers of adolescent girls, and interviews with members of the community. We look forward to sharing some of the key findings of the baseline report in early 2024.

Over the coming year and beyond, we will focus on...

... setting ourselves up to “win” (learn)

Having recently updated our learning agenda, we will focus on strengthening our ability to execute the agenda, from addressing staffing and support needs to forming strategic partnerships with others in the ecosystem to allow us to gather and share relevant data in multiple ways and from multiple sources.

... sharing what we have learned

We know that knowledge is a powerful resource, particularly for the numerous CBOs that are eager to learn from one another, as well as other actors working towards ending child marriage. We are, therefore, committed to sharing what we learn, with the intention of deepening external audiences’ understanding of the unique role of CBOs in ending child marriage, what we’re learning about what’s most effective in advancing gender equality and challenging child marriage, as well the role of our funding-plus model in supporting CBOs. In doing so, we will increase the visibility of the work of our partners as well as amplify girls’ voices.

...supporting CBOs to produce and share knowledge

The Girls First Fund is premised on the belief that CBOs are a powerful force for catalyzing change. This is reflected in our learning approach as well, acknowledging that locally led CBOs, often with limited resources and no formal MEL/ research training, hold and can produce knowledge. To support this, we will provide MEL capacity strengthening support, provide funding for grantee-led research & learning initiatives, and look for opportunities to support grantee partners to share their knowledge widely and contribute to the expansion of a global evidence base on locally relevant gender transformative and girl-led and/or-centered solutions.

We thank Suzanne Petroni (and her team) as well as Nidal Karim whose guidance and contributions have been used to generate the insights and learning presented in this report.



MAKING **CONNECTIONS**



New Collaboration with Gates, Clooney, and Obama Foundations

This year brought a new opportunity to partner with the Gates Foundation, the Clooney Foundation for Justice, and the Girls Opportunity Alliance to accelerate progress to end child marriage. This unique partnership is strategically leveraging the platforms and convening power of the three principals: Amal Clooney, Melinda French Gates, and Michelle Obama, to bring urgency and visibility to the issue of child marriage and to broaden the base of global champions invested in the issue. These partners will help to drive forward progress and momentum, and expand impact by focusing on joint advocacy, promotion of girls' leadership, expanded resource mobilization to the existing ecosystem, and the strengthening of the legal and policy infrastructure to end child marriage that holds more leaders to account and joins more women and girls in taking legal action to advocate for their rights.

Connecting Grantee Partners to New Funders

We have also focused heavily on expanding the philanthropic investment in community-based organizations beyond our own. We are working to bring more players to the table to provide

direct-to-grantee fundraising and have played both a connecting role and an intermediary due diligence role to help cultivate these relationships. As a measure of our commitment to radically expanding funding to community-based organizations, we can report that 51% of grantees reported securing new funding this past year for a total of \$4,596,791. CBOs are building their own internal systems and are achieving additional outside funding at significant rates, demonstrating that consistent, multi-year funding allows smaller, grassroots organizations to mature and attract new funding that allows the movement overall to grow.

Women Deliver Conference 2023

In July, with a 14-member delegation of our team and grantee partners, we attended the Women Deliver Conference 2023 in Rwanda. This was our biggest delegation to an international convening so far, and included representatives from our grantee partners Les Ailes du Cœur (Democratic Republic of Congo); CONAMUCA and Caminante Proyecto Educativo (Dominican Republic); Cellule Nigérienne des Jeunes Filles Leader (Niger); and Girls to Lead Africa (Uganda). During the conference, we led key engagements, centering the voices, experiences and learnings of our grantee partners from their work in communities. These

engagements included: co-hosting the Population Council-led Girls Deliver Pre-Conference on Adolescent Girls and co-leading a roundtable on education at the event; participating in a roundtable hosted by Purposeful to build girls' political power; and partnering with development Research and Projects Center (dRPC) from Nigeria to host a session on education as a pathway to ending child marriage, with a particular focus on experiences from Nigeria and Uganda.

In partnership with the American Jewish World Service (AJWS) and WomenStrong International, we also hosted a concurrent session with young feminist leaders from the Global Majority speaking about their experiences, priorities and challenges and what success looks like for them. We discussed feminist, trust-based funding practices and how funders should adapt their approaches to better support grantee-led social change efforts. As a team, we hosted an intimate partner event along with our founder Mabel van Oranje to convene our grantee partners, Advisory Board members, adolescent girl leaders, donors, and collaborators for conversation and connection. We were excited to support our grantee partners to fully participate in this global space and to have the opportunity to share our work.



INSTITUTIONAL **GROWTH**



We have made significant and targeted investments in organizational growth and development over the last year. We maintained a robust safeguarding infrastructure, developed and executed an in-depth compensation philosophy, took on new staff in critical roles, developed values-aligned HR policies, and refreshed our approach to governance with in-depth conversations with diverse stakeholders. Much of this was accomplished with targeted support from the Packard Foundation, which allowed us to leverage external expertise to help develop the systems and policies that align with our Fund’s ethos.

Staffing

We aligned our staffing structure to the Fund’s needs while remaining nimble and maintaining an overall investment rate of 85% into grants and programs. This has included the recruitment of a Director of Development and Partnerships, a Senior Communications Officer, a Director of Learning, Program Advisors for Guinea and Guatemala, and an Executive Assistant to the Fund Director. The overwhelming majority of our team members (15 out of 18 people in total) is from the Global Majority.

Compensation Philosophy

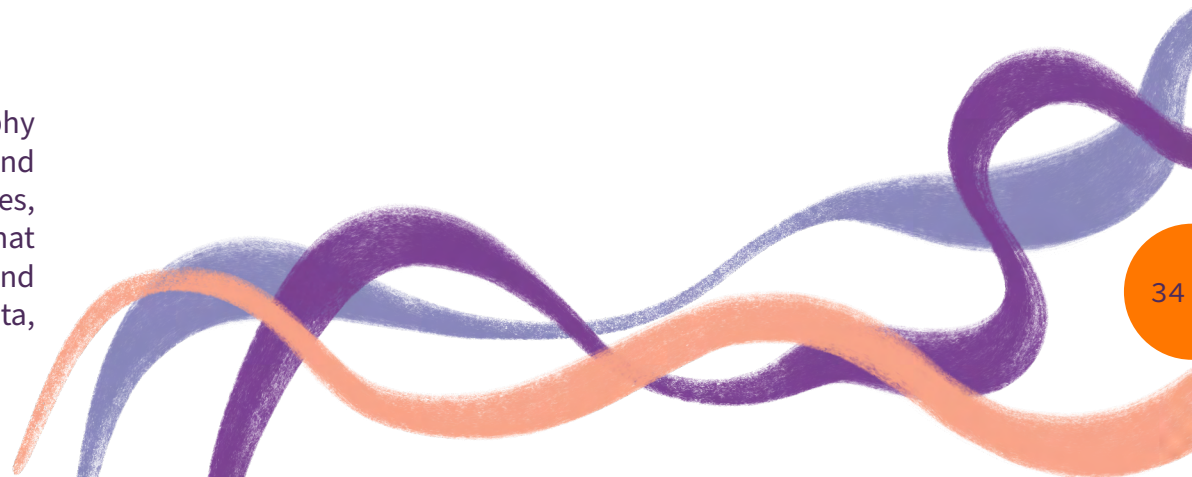
Partnering with Edgility, we elaborated our first compensation philosophy including a complete review and benchmarking of our roles and compensation packages. With the goal of bringing us closer to our values, we were able to execute an equitable approach to compensation that aligned to the market without compromising the competitiveness and financial health of the Fund. We looked at internal equity, market data,

organizational context, and financial sustainability, and made a commitment to ensure that every staff member understands their role, their salary, and their opportunities for advancement.

Governance

With support from Busara Africa, we led a multi-stakeholder effort to ask how our governance framework can best reflect increased diversity from the contexts in which we work and strengthen accountability to continue serving women and girls in the Child, Early and Forced Marriage and Unions (CEFMU) ecosystem effectively. The team held discussions with our advisory board, staff and management, grantees and other partners, and helped us to revise our bylaws and advisory board composition to take our Fund through its next iteration.

As a part of this revision, we are exploring what structures or approaches would allow for meaningful engagement of girls and young women in the decision making and strategy processes at both the country level and the global level.



Understanding and Practicing Language Justice

This year, we have had an incredible experience learning about and developing our practice of language justice at the level of the Fund, and in our engagements with our grantee partners. Part of the mission of language justice is to name and disrupt linguisticism – the unequal power dynamics and oppression based on the language(s) we use or the way(s) we use language that exists in western globalized culture.

To ensure a safe and equitable space for our Changemakers Council girls, and supported by the Children’s Rights Innovation Fund (CRIF), we engaged language justice practitioners Jen/Elena Hofer and Yaya/ Norma Laureano to support our Council convenings, which brought together the 11 girl/young women members who spoke at least five different languages. Our goal was to create a space that allowed each participant to feel comfortable communicating their ideas and contributions in their own language.

Through this partnership, we are learning more deeply about how language justice asserts everyone’s right to communicate, receive information, understand, and participate in conversations in their own languages. Language justice invites us to recognize how language has been used, and is still used, to oppress, separate and exclude people and communities. The goal is to create equitable multilingual spaces centered around accessibility and inclusion, where no language dominates over any other and where everyone’s communication needs are met.

“The Changemakers Council was an exemplary model of language justice in action. Creating an equitable multilingual space required everyone’s commitment and participation – not just that of the language workers who are in the space to support multilingual communication. Our Girls First Fund partners have been open to learning about their role in language justice practices, and they’ve been extremely attentive to our recommendations, quick to implement any changes to ensure the fullest possible participation on the part of the girls and young women who are at the center of this program. As a result, their first Participatory Grantmaking Program involving young women from different parts of the world was genuinely participatory. Not only were the participants able to express themselves and make decisions during every phase, but the process itself empowered them as change agents – one of the central objectives of the program. It was deeply fulfilling for us as coordinators and for our team of language workers to hear the girls and young women speak about their gratitude around getting to meet activists from other parts of the world working on congruent issues, and to witness them share how they felt more empowered, heard and seen, and ready to speak more openly about forced marriages in their communities.”

- Jen and Yaya

CELEBRATING **SUCCESS**



From the far western hills of Nepal to global recognition

This year, we were honored to celebrate **Sarswati Nepali, President of our grantee partner organization Dalit Society Development Forum** in Nepal, as she received an inaugural US Secretary of State's Global Anti-Racism Champions Award (GARC). Sarswati is an acclaimed social activist and a lifelong defender of the human rights of marginalized castes, the disabled, and the poor. For over twenty years, she has demonstrated sustained leadership in advancing the human rights of members of the most marginalized ethnic communities in Nepal. Sarswati's decades of advocacy on behalf of those in most need and her demonstrated success in attaining justice and amplifying the voices of the marginalized are a model of courage in the pursuit of dignity and human rights.

"I never thought that I would get this award. It is like my biggest dream come true. Because of this news, many people around the world got to know about Nepal and my organization. I also got the opportunity to learn about the work of the other awardees from different countries. I am feeling more motivated and confident to continue my work. With this recognition, I feel more responsible toward my community- especially women and girls. I also want to thank the Girls First Fund for trusting me and my organization and being the first international donor to support our work."

-Sarswati Nepali

Caps and Gowns for Graduation Season

In different parts of the world, students graduated at various stages of their education journey, and this included girls in the communities where our grantee partners are leading change.

Seventeen-year-old Sofia* is one of these graduates from the Dominican Republic. Sofia got pregnant as a teenager but was supported and cared for by her mother who also refused permission for Sofia to marry her daughter's father. As a teen mother, she connected with our grantee partner CAMINANTE, who supported her to continue her education despite the challenges and teasing she faced from her peers.

"I didn't have a lot of knowledge about most things before connecting with CAMINANTE. I was very shy, and it was difficult for me to express myself. With their constant follow-up, guidance, and activities that taught me to know myself, plan my life and motivate me to move forward, I became more confident and was able to complete my studies."

Sofia has now graduated from high school and plans to pursue higher education. She shared, "I want to go to college, become a professional and give my daughter a better future so that she can be proud of her mother and know that everything we propose and dream of in life can be achieved."

We are incredibly proud of Sofia and all the girls who graduated this year, especially those who have been supported by our grantee partners. And to ensure that girls like Sofia have a fair chance at success, we will continue to serve and support, grounded in our belief that CBOs can, and are leading change!

**Name has been changed to protect her identity*

Our Funders

Wellspring
Philanthropic Fund

the David &
Lucile Packard
FOUNDATION

 THE
KENEDA
FUND


NATIONALE
POSTCODE
LOTTERIJ

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Girls


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FONDATION
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GIVING

 FORD
FOUNDATION

 CHILDREN'S
INVESTMENT FUND
FOUNDATION

ANONYMOUS

 FOUNDATION
FOR A JUST
SOCIETY

BILL & MELINDA
GATES foundation

 NoVo
Foundation

Our Grantee Partners

Aadibasi Janajati Mahila Utthan Kendra
Aamaa Milan Kendra
Aawaaj
Access Youth Initiative Uganda
Actions en Faveur des Vulnerables
Adarsh Seva Sansthan
ADITHI
Afia Mama asbl
Agir Plus
Alliance des Religieux pour le Développement Socio-Educatif-Economique et Sanitaire
Alliance for Children and Youth- Uganda
Alliance for Community Transformation Uganda
Amani Initiative
Amuria Youth Alliance Development Organization
Ashmita Nepal
Ashray
Asociación de Ayuda a las Familias
Asociación de Mujeres de Quisqueya
Asociación Promoción de la Mujer del Sur
Association des Blogueurs pour une Citoyenneté Active
Association des Jeunes Pour le Développement Locale
Association des Volontaires pour la Réconciliation et le Développement des Pays des Grands-Lacs
Association for Advocacy and Legal Initiatives Trust (AALI)
Association Nigérienne pour le Progrès et la Défense des Droits de la Femme et l'Enfant
Association Pour l'Epanouissement des Jeunes et des Femmes

Association pour la protection et l'accompagnement de la jeune fille
Association: Allah Karim
Ayo Aidari Trust
Bread and Knowledge Too
Breakthrough Trust
Brigades des Filles du Congo
Caminante Proyecto Educativo
Cellule Nigérienne des Jeunes Filles Leaders
Center for Economic Social and Cultural Rights in Africa
Center for Karnali Rural Promote and Society Development
Centre D'action Pour le Développement Intégral des Jeunes
Centre d'Encadrement pour la Détraumatisation, Assistance Médico-socio-judiciaire et Développement Intégral
Centre for Domestic Violence Prevention
Centre Pour la Protection de la Jeune Fille de Kabalo
Centro de Servicios Legales para la Mujer
Centro para la Educación y el Desarrollo
Colectivo de información para mujeres 28 Lunas
Community Consortium Uganda
Community Initiative for Prosperity and Advancement Limited
Comunidad de Lesbianas Inclusivas Dominicanas
Conexión Intercultural por el Bienestar y la Autonomía La Ceiba
Confederación Nacional de Mujeres del Campo
Coordinadora de Mujeres del Cibao, Inc.

Creative Institute Nepal
Dalit Development Forum, Siraha
Dalit Feminist Upliftment Organization
Dalit Women Rights Forum Nepal
Debout Fille
Environment Development Society - Surkhet
Espace de Réflexion et Action des Filles
Extend A Life Initiative Uganda Limited
Fatima Foundation Nepal
Fédération "Rayuwar Karkara" des Réseaux MMD de Yékoua
Fédération de Femmes pour la Paix et le Développement
Feminist Approach to Technology Society
Femmes Actions et Développement
Freed Kamalari Development Forum
Fundación de Salvación M.E.N.A
Fundación Desarrollo Integral Manos Anaranjadas
Fundación Paso a Paso con los Niños
Fundación Paso Joven
Fundación Voz para Sordos Alianza para el Desarrollo y la Integración Social Inc
Girl Empowerment Foundation
Girls Support Center
Girls to Lead Africa
Gramin Mahila Srijanshil Pariwar (GMSP)
Gramoday Chetna Kendra
Green Home Organization for Women Development
Groupe de Volontaires pour la Défenses des Droits de la Femme
Groupement Fahamey

Groupement Féminin Hakouri
Groupement Féminin KATIBI
Hamro Prayas
Hope of Young Mothers Development Initiative
Hope Sahel
Jabala Action Research Organisation
Janaki Women Network, Dhanusha
Jharkhand Gramin Vikas Trust
Jharkhand Mahila Uthan
Jharkhand Vikas Parishad
Joy for Children-Uganda
Junta de Mujeres Mamá Tingó
JUNTAS POR TI Y TUS DERECHOS
Kikorongo Women Community
Kiruhura Women Development Agency
La Coalition des Organisations Nigérienne des
Droits de l'Enfant
Les Ailes du Coeur
LIFE Nepal
des Enfants et Elèves
Lok Prerna Kendra
LOK SWAR
Lower Cell Poultry Farmers Association
Mahila Janachetna Kendra
MAHILA MUKTI SANSTHA
Mariposas Emprendiendo el Vuelo
Mentoring and Empowerment Programme for
Young Women
Mieux Vivre avec le Millénaire
Movimiento de Mujeres Dominico Haitiana
Movimiento por los Derechos Humanos la Paz y la
Justicia Global
Mpigi Women With Disabilities Association
Mujeres en Desarrollo Dominicana Inc
Mujeres Socio políticas Florinda Soriano M. T.
Muktika Lagi Mahila Aviyan Nepal (Mukti Nepal)
Mungane Organization
Muslim Teen Mothers Upraising Against Islam
Forced Early Marriages, Marginalization and

Extremism
Naya Sawera Vikas Kendra
Núcleo de Apoyo a la Mujer
ONG de Lutte Contre la Drogue la Corruption et la
traite des Personnes (ADDENA)
ONG Femmes et Enfants Epanouis (FEE)
ONG MATAN GOBE
ONG New Challenges "Empower Girls and Women"
Organización de Mujeres Génesis
Parikalpana Nepal
Passion4Community Development Organisation
Philanthropic Rural Development Association
Point of View
Prerana Bharati
Promotion de l'Entreprenariat Jeunesse et du
Leadership Féminin
Province Level Network Against Child Marriage
Raising Teenagers Uganda
Regulatory Association for Social & Territorial Assist
Réseau des Jeunes Ambassadeurs pour la Santé
Reproductive et la Planification Familiale
Resilient Women's Organization
Rugby Tackling Life
Rural Disabled Women Association
Sabiny Transformation Initiative
Sahyogini
SAMABIKAS - Nepal
Samadhan
SANGAM Myagdi
Santé de la Reproduction pour une Maternité Sans
Risque
Sauve la Femme et la Jeune Fille du Katanga
SHAKHI Friends of Women
Soiya Mahila Swabalambi Sanstha
Solidarité des Jeunes Filles Pour l'Education et
l'Intégration Socioprofessionnelle
Solidarité pour le développement et

l'autonomisation de la femme
Soroti Girls Right Initiative
Soutien aux ONG Empowerment et Stratégies de
développement
Srijan Foundation
Srijan Mahila Vikas Manch
Structure d'Aide et de Réinsertion des détenus et
Enfants en Difficulté
Sud - Ouest Développement
Take a Step Women's Association
The Women's Probono Initiative Ltd
Together We Can Foundation
Women And Girls Rights Advocacy Uganda Limited
Women Awareness Group
Women Development Forum, Bajura
Women Empowerment Resource Center
Young Women Initiative for Development
Youth Fraternity for Change
Youth Unity for Voluntary Action

The Changemakers Council

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- Gisely Pool Rodriguez (Dominican Republic);
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- Mayerli Montufar Mendoza (Guatemala);
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- Priyanka Kumari (India);
- Ragini Jha (Nepal);
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