



GENDER EQUALITY LEARNING FROM PRACTICE SERIES

PART 2: THE GENDER STRATEGY

MAY 2025



BACKGROUND

The A360 and Gender Equality Learning from Practice Series was launched to share key insights from Population Services International (PSI)'s Adolescents 360 (A360) project experience in integrating gender equality throughout its Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health (ASRH) programming. By documenting and disseminating these practical insights, A360 aims to contribute to the global evidence base on gender transformative programming. This will equip practitioners with effective tools and approaches to draw on when designing their own programs. This paper, the second in the learning series, explores the development and implementation of the [A360 Gender Strategy](#). It aims to provide practical guidance while highlighting the importance of adaptable, context-specific approaches to advancing gender equality in ASRH programming.



BOX 1: WHAT IS A360?

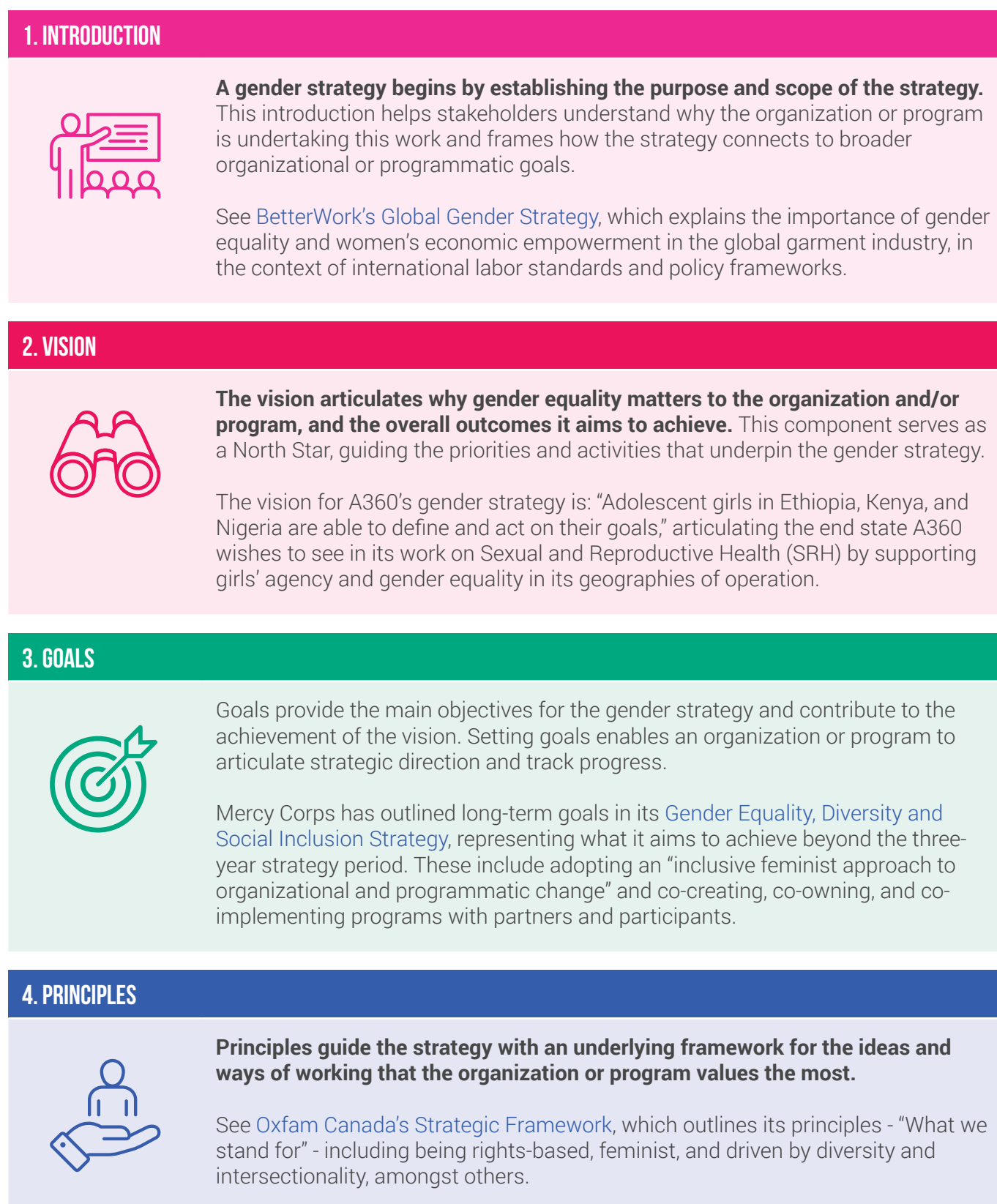
Adolescents 360 (A360) is an adolescent girl-centered sexual and reproductive health project implemented in Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Kenya. A360's interventions make contraception relevant to girls' goals and aspirations and support their voluntary uptake of modern contraceptive methods. In A360's current investment phase, the project is providing technical assistance to governments to sustainably scale these approaches and strengthen the health system for adolescent-responsive programming. The project is funded by the Gates Foundation (GF) and the Children's Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF).

WHAT IS A GENDER STRATEGY?

A gender strategy articulates a program or organization's comprehensive approach to addressing gender equality across program interventions and/or internal operations. The duration for a strategy may vary depending on the lifecycle of a program, although strategies typically have an implementation period of between one and five years. While the specific form of a gender strategy may differ based on geographic context, organizational type, and available resources, effective gender strategies share several foundational elements that provide structure and accountability. The common building blocks of an effective gender strategy are described below (see Figure 1).

It's important to note that while called a "gender strategy," this approach should ideally consider intersectionality, recognizing that gender interacts with other factors such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability status, and socioeconomic background. The terms gender strategy and GESI (Gender Equality and Social Inclusion) strategy are often used interchangeably. This intersectional lens ensures the strategy addresses multiple forms of marginalization and exclusion.

Figure 1: Building blocks of a gender strategy



5. GENDER ANALYSIS



At the heart of any effective gender strategy lies a thoughtful gender analysis of the context in which the organization or program operates. This analysis examines gender-based disparities, power dynamics, and structural barriers that affect both the organization internally and the communities it serves. The strategy should summarize key findings from this analysis, highlighting critical gender-related issues, challenges, and opportunities most relevant to the organization or program's work.

A gender analysis might reveal critical findings that require the rethinking of key programmatic components. For instance, it might reveal that adolescent girls face unique barriers to accessing reproductive health services due to cultural norms, limited mobility, or financial constraints. These findings then inform the priorities established in the next section.

There are various toolkits and guidelines on how to conduct a gender analysis, such as Canada's [Gender-Based Analysis Plus](#), [Jhpiego's Gender Analysis](#) guidance, and [CARE's Rapid Gender Analysis](#).

6. GENDER EQUALITY PRIORITIES AND ACTIVITIES



Based on the gender analysis, the strategy identifies specific gender equality priorities at both organizational and programmatic levels. At the organizational level, priorities might address how Human Resources (HR) processes can be strengthened from a gender equality perspective as well as socializing the gender strategy, strengthening staff's gender capacity, and identifying entry points for staff from different departments to contribute to its implementation. At the programmatic level, priorities focus on how activities or services can better promote gender equality among the people the organization or program serves.

See the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) [Regional Gender Equality Strategy](#), which outlines programmatic priorities such as advancing gender equality in regional trade and economic integration alongside the organizational priority of strengthening IGAD's institutional capacity for leadership and coordination of gender equality and women's empowerment interventions.

7. WORK PLAN



A gender strategy must move beyond aspiration to action through a clear implementation plan. This plan includes specific milestones, timelines, responsibilities, and budget allocations for each priority. Without these concrete elements, even the most thoughtfully crafted priorities may fail to materialize.

For example, the International Climate Initiative (IKI) operationalized its [Gender Strategy](#) with a [Gender Action Plan](#), which includes specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) metrics, targets, budgets, and names the types of departments or projects involved.

8. MONITORING, EVALUATION & ACCOUNTABILITY



Finally, the gender strategy should establish how progress will be measured and who holds responsibility for achieving results. This section identifies specific indicators for each gender priority and outlines mechanisms for regular monitoring and evaluation. Additionally, it should clearly state accountability structures—who is responsible for what aspects of implementation and how and when progress will be reported to stakeholders.

For example, GIZ (the German Society for International Cooperation) clearly articulates how success would be measured against each of its strategic priorities by listing SMART indicators listed as “key results” in its [Gender Strategy](#).

Perhaps most importantly, a gender strategy should not be viewed as a static, one-time document.

Rather, it should function as a living roadmap that evolves as the organization implements activities, gathers feedback from employees and communities served, and learns what works and what doesn't. As initial priorities are achieved, the organization or program can expand its focus to address additional gender equality challenges. This iterative approach allows the strategy to remain relevant and responsive to changing needs and contexts.

Organizations working in areas including sexual and reproductive health or with adolescent girls often find that their gender strategies require regular refinement as they better understand the complex gender dynamics affecting their work. By approaching gender strategy development as an ongoing process rather than a check box exercise, organizations can create meaningful and sustainable change toward gender equality. As such, clear reflection points should be built into the strategy, whereby the team can adapt the approach to remain responsive to emerging needs and the changing context.

CASE STUDY

A360'S GENDER STRATEGY

The A360 program has placed gender equality at the core of its approach to Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health (ASRH) programming. Recognizing that gender norms and power dynamics significantly impact adolescent girls' agency and health outcomes, A360 developed a comprehensive gender strategy to guide its work across multiple countries. This strategy represents a deliberate effort to move beyond gender sensitive approaches toward more transformative programming that challenges underlying gender inequalities and builds girls' agency.

A360's gender strategy provides a framework that shapes how the program designs, implements, and measures its interventions across Ethiopia, Kenya, and Nigeria. Built on feminist principles and co-created through participatory processes, the strategy centers adolescent girls' voices and agency while addressing the complex socio-ecological factors that influence their lives and choices.



BOX 2: HOW IS A360'S GENDER STRATEGY UNIQUE?

A360's gender strategy stands out for its distinctive approach that prioritizes adolescent girls' agency:

- **The strategy maintains an explicit focus on adolescent girls (aged 15-19) and their ability to “define and act on their goals”** in the context of sexual and reproductive health.
- A360's approach is **firmly grounded in Human-Centered Design¹** and [Meaningful Youth Engagement](#) approaches, ensuring that girls' voices, perspectives, and views are central to program design decisions.
- The program utilizes a co-created **socio-ecological framework specifically aligned with ASRH programming** (see Figure 2 below) to understand and address the complex web of gendered norms influencing girls' lives at individual, household, community, health facility, and state levels.
- A360 places a **strong emphasis on generating evidence, learning, and public knowledge products** related to gender transformative ASRH programming, with the aim of influencing key stakeholders to adopt and replicate their approaches.
- **The strategy functions as a “living document”** meant to be built on, refined, tested, and improved throughout implementation, with a dedicated Senior Program Manager leading this adaptive work to design increasingly gender transformative approaches.

HOW WAS THE A360 GENDER STRATEGY DEVELOPED?

The A360 Gender Strategy development unfolded through a thoughtful, collaborative process that emphasized participation and localization across multiple countries. The original strategy emerged from a four-month co-creation journey in 2021, while a mid-term refresh in 2024 further strengthened the strategy by incorporating lessons learned during the first three years of strategy implementation.

ORIGINAL STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

The initial development process involved close collaboration between the A360 team and [Kore Global](#), a gender equality and social impact advisory and technical assistance firm. This process included four interconnected stages—inception, ideation, refinement, and documentation—all conducted remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic using digital collaboration tools such as Mural, Zoom, and Loom videos.

¹ For more information on Human-Centered Design, see <https://hcdexchange.org/>



BOX 3: A360'S GENDER STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Inception: Participatory kick-off workshops to co-design the strategy development process with the core strategy team

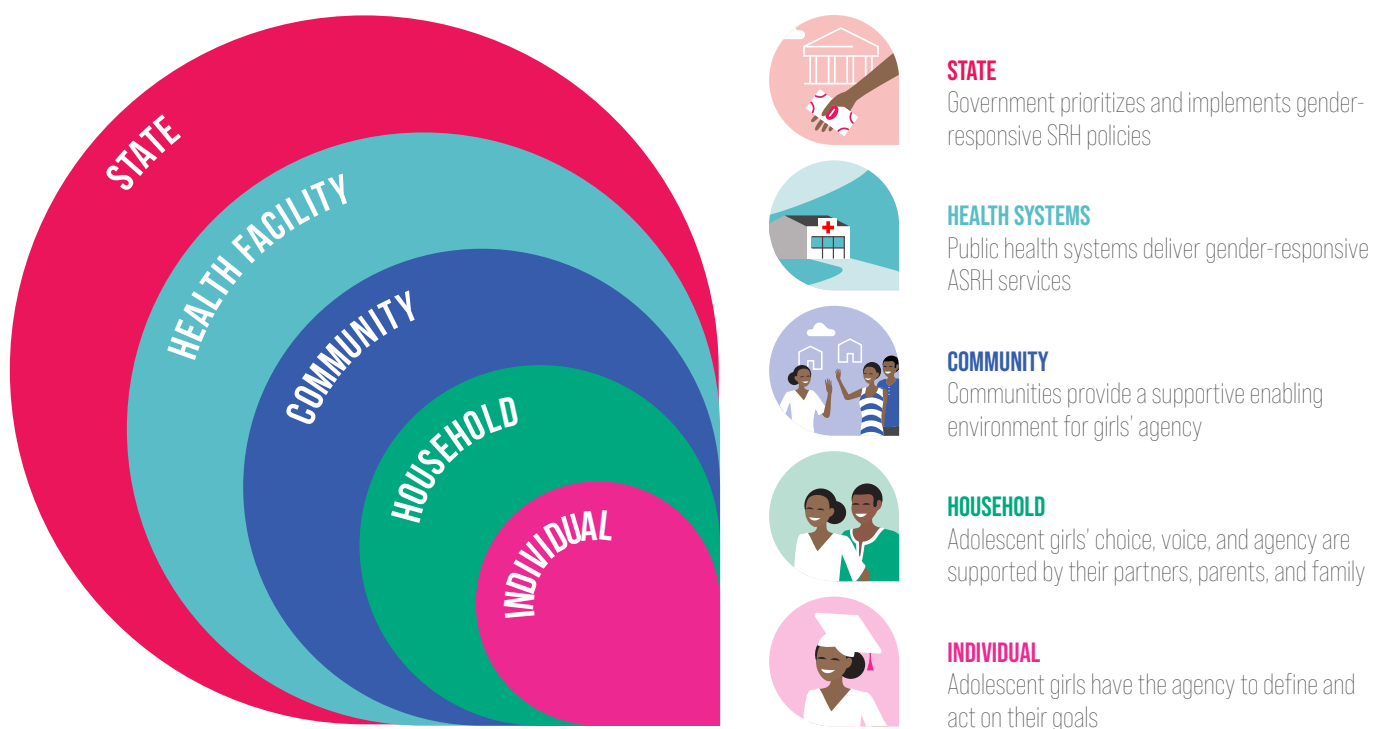
Ideation: A series of workshops to look back on key learnings across each geography, scan and capture key gender trends in each context, co-create the analysis framework, develop hypotheses for how to support girls to define and act on their goals, and brainstorm strategic approaches

Refine and renew: Refinement of the strategic approaches, development of a results framework

Documentation: Co-development of the strategy document

The development of the gender strategy resulted in the co-creation of the **socio-ecological framework** (Figure 2), which outlines how the strategy contributes to adolescent girls' agency and gender equality at each level of society, from the individual through to the state level. The overall vision of the gender strategy is to enable adolescent girls to define and act on their goals.

Figure 2: A360's socio-ecological framework



Essential to the strategy development process was the development of in-country gender assessments to better understand each country's context. A360 staff were engaged through the validation of the strategy with country teams. As one staff member who participated in the original development explains:

"The in-country gender assessments that fed into the strategy helped put gender into context in terms of what was needed for the program to be more gender transformative."

- Fifi Ogbondeminu, A360 Global Director.

A key result of the gender strategy was the establishment of a Gender Champions Network, composed of gender focal points (Gender Champions) selected from A360 staff, as well as Gender Consultants in each of the three countries. These Gender Champions and Consultants provide ongoing technical advice, capacity strengthening and support to A360 staff in the implementation of the gender strategy.

MID-TERM STRATEGY REFRESH

The mid-term refresh built upon the foundation of the original strategy while reflecting on changes to the internal and external contexts and lessons learned. The refresh process was able to capitalize on the knowledge and experiences of the Gender Champions and Consultants, who were given the opportunity to reflect on the key wins, roadblocks, and lessons learned from three years of strategy implementation. The Gender Champions and Consultants, along with other key A360 staff members who made up the strategy working group, also considered how the program's implementation context had changed in the years since the strategy's creation, the associated implications for the strategy, and evolving program priorities. Virtual workshops were held on Mural's online whiteboard collaboration software to unpack these key questions and agree on priorities for the next three years. The process was highly participatory as highlighted by several Gender Champions and Consultants:

"The refresh was a collaborative process and gave everyone the space to speak and reflect. The Mural board was left open for people to revisit in their own time and add their thoughts and reflections."

- Hadeezah Haruna-Usie, A360 Gender Consultant, Nigeria.

"The refresh was engaging and created the opportunity for each country to participate and reflect on the ideas shared as well as to learn from other countries' experiences."

- Hibiete Tesfaye, A360 Gender Consultant, Ethiopia.

Country teams particularly valued how the refreshed strategy incorporated local contexts:

"More country context in the refreshed strategy has brought it to life."

- Hadeezah Haruna-Usie, A360 Gender Consultant, Nigeria.

"The refresh considered local practices and perspectives and addressed practicalities in the country context."

- Hibiete Tesfaye, A360 Gender Consultant, Ethiopia.

The strategy refresh process enabled country teams to take the time to reflect on how well different intervention components were integrating gender equality and to consider how to strengthen this where necessary.

"The strategy provided an accessible reference framework to assess the different interventions in terms of gender integration. The Nigeria team could see how gender equality was being promoted through some activities, for example, the 9ja Girls life skills curriculum to build girls' communication and decision-making skills. They could also see where program content should be improved from a gender perspective."

- Fifi Ogbondeminu, A360 Global Director.

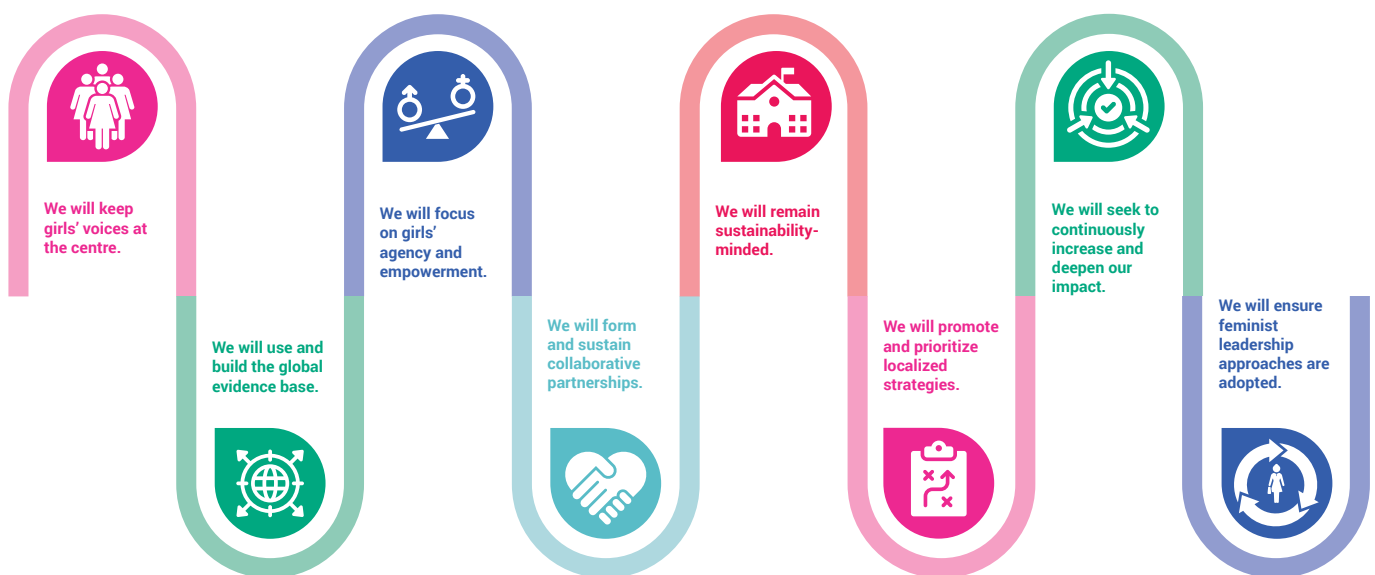
LEARNING FROM THE PROCESS

The mid-term strategy refresh process yielded valuable insights about what is needed to successfully implement the gender strategy. Several Gender Champions mentioned that the involvement of senior leadership at the country level was crucial for accountability and to drive implementation forward. The Gender Champions also highlighted the importance of gender capacity strengthening activities with staff members that have increased awareness of, and buy-in for, strategy implementation. The need to localize and contextualize the strategy for staff to fully understand the relevance and utility of the strategy was another key lesson from the refresh process. The refreshed strategy builds upon these learnings by adding new guiding principles, detailing country-specific activities, introducing strategic enablers for implementation, and including a concrete implementation plan.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES OF THE STRATEGY?

The A360 Gender Strategy is guided by a set of core principles that provide direction and philosophical grounding for all program activities. These principles, which were co-developed with A360 staff, evolved over time, with two new principles, localization and feminist leadership, added during the mid-term strategy refresh to strengthen the approach.

Figure 3: Principles for the A360 Gender Strategy



PRINCIPLES IN ACTION

KEEPING GIRLS' VOICES AT THE CENTER

This principle ensures that adolescent girls' perspectives directly shape program design and implementation. In all three countries, this manifests through 'aspirational' program activities that seek to support girls in identifying and pursuing their goals. Speaking about the A360 program [Binti Shupavu](#), a former Gender Champion in Kenya stated:

"Binti Shupavu skills sessions occur when girls are available, and the content is tailor-made to their needs in terms of the knowledge they wish to gain and the skills they wish to develop. Girls co-design their graduation ceremony (Binti Shupavu Fest), and they are given the space to share the knowledge and skills they gained through the program."

- Peris Waithaka, former A360 Gender Champion, Kenya.

FOCUS ON GIRLS' AGENCY AND EMPOWERMENT

This principle emphasizes building girls' capacity to make and act on their own decisions. In all three countries, program activities are specifically designed to strengthen girls' agency:

"Empowering girls gives them the courage to speak with other girls, and engage them, as well as their parents and the wider community, in program activities."

- Peris Waithaka, former A360 Gender Champion, Kenya.

SUSTAINABILITY-MINDED APPROACHES

This principle focuses on creating lasting change beyond the program lifecycle through government integration and system strengthening. A key focus of A360's work with government stakeholders, service providers and community leaders is to institutionalize the program into government policy and practice, and to provide critical technical assistance to the government to own and implement A360's interventions directly.

COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

The principle of partnership guides how A360 engages with local stakeholders to create an enabling environment where girls' agency can thrive. A360 recognizes that the project alone cannot meet each girl's needs, and therefore seeks partnerships with service providers who can offer more opportunities for girls to pursue their goals. This includes partners who can re-enroll them in school or support furthering their formal education, who provide vocational training, and those offering public and private loan programs, for example. A360 also works closely with government partners at the regional and national levels.

CONTINUOUS LEARNING AND IMPACT

A360 commits to [adaptive implementation](#) that responds to emerging insights and changing contexts, focusing on increasing the quality and effectiveness of programming across geographies.

EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACHES

The strategy prioritizes balancing what the A360 project knows works from the evidence base with the new and unique perspectives of its end users. It also upholds the commitment to advance the available evidence on what works to support gender transformative ASRH programming, for example, through open-source data and resources on the [A360 Learning Hub](#).

LOCALIZATION

The mid-term refresh explicitly added localization as a guiding principle, emphasizing the importance of contextualizing approaches to each country's cultural and social environment. This also centers local decision-makers, giving country teams agency in determining how best to implement the project's gender priorities as experts in their own context:

"There are adaptations to the program in the different counties across Kenya that incorporate cultural nuances. Ensuring that the program is contextualized deepens impact. For example, in Narok county, FGM (Female Genital Mutilation) is a common practice, which is addressed in the program content."

- Wendy Okolo and Peris Waithaka, A360, Kenya.

FEMINIST LEADERSHIP

This principle was added to emphasize collaborative and inclusive ways of working. However, it is important to acknowledge that the term feminist is viewed differently in different contexts, which can pose challenges to its adoption more widely. As stated by the Gender Champions and Consultants:

"In our culture, talking about feminism doesn't have a positive interpretation so there is a need to contextualize the concept so people can understand. A feminist is viewed as someone who wants ONLY girls to lead, at the exclusion of men."

- Lidiya Berihun, A360 Gender Champion, Ethiopia.

Despite these challenges, the program continues to work toward feminist leadership principles:

"Working with adolescent girls and influencing the enabling environment are both key to supporting potential feminist leadership in the future."

- Wendy Okolo, A360 Gender Consultant, Kenya.

These principles collectively create a framework that guides A360's approach to gender transformative programming, emphasizing girls' voices and agency while recognizing the importance of contextualization, sustainability, and evidence-based implementation. The principles provide a "North Star" for aligning planning and resources with strategic intent across all program activities.

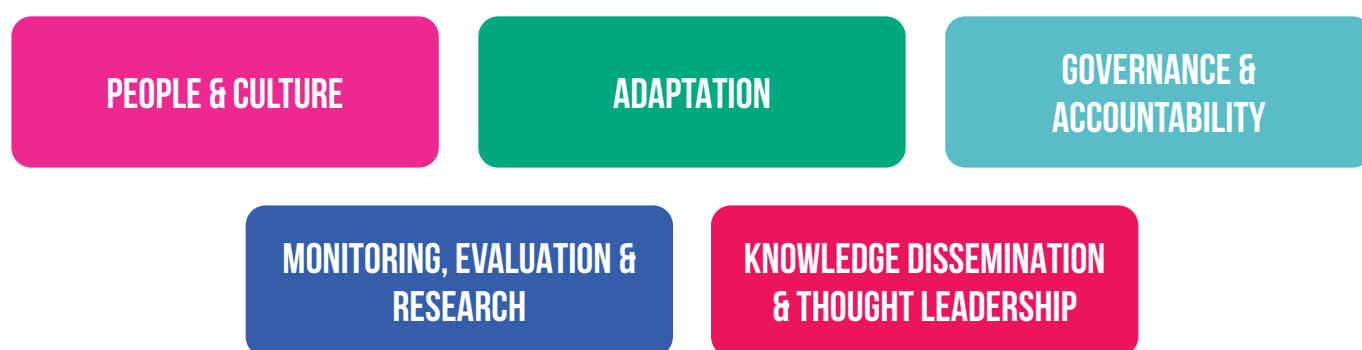
HOW IS THE STRATEGY APPLIED IN PRACTICE?

A gender strategy's true impact lies in its practical application. For A360, strategic enablers, implementation plans, and ongoing monitoring drive this application.

STRATEGIC ENABLERS

A360 recognizes that effectively applying its gender strategy requires more than just good intentions. It necessitates strategic enablers (see Figure 4), which are cross-cutting themes designed to support strategy implementation.

Figure 4: Strategic Enablers



For A360, the strategic enablers include **People and Culture**, which involves building gender capacity within the organization through comprehensive training and a Gender Champions network and ensuring gender equality principles are integrated into Human Resources processes. As the Kenya Gender Consultant emphasized, *"It's key to have a technical gender expert to provide support to the wider team, in terms of translating the strategy into objectives and activities."* This highlights the critical role of dedicated gender expertise in driving practical application.

Adaptation is crucial to ensure the program continues to meet girls' changing needs and aspirations. The [first paper in this learning series](#) explains how A360 utilizes the gender equality continuum within design and adaptation processes to facilitate more gender transformative programming.

Clear **Governance and Accountability mechanisms** ensure that gender equality goals are set and tracked over time, with the oversight of senior leadership. Strengthening **Monitoring, Evaluation, and Research** with a gender lens is also crucial. For A360, this has involved revising the program's theory of change, updating the results framework with gender-focused indicators, and realigning the research agenda with gender equality priorities. Finally, A360 ensures it provides **Thought Leadership** in the sector by widely sharing its knowledge and learnings.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN AND QUARTERLY UPDATES

The refreshed gender strategy includes a detailed one-year implementation plan, outlining specific activities, responsible leads, timelines, and status updates across key areas. This level of detailed planning ensures accountability and facilitates progress tracking. In addition, country roadmaps designed to localize the gender strategy have been created and implemented across the three program geographies, with the oversight of Gender Champions and senior management:

"Country roadmap development involves many members of the country team, including staff from HR, Finance, MEL (Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning), among others."

- Joy Otsanya Ede, Gender Champion, Nigeria.

This collaborative approach underscores the importance of involving diverse team members in the implementation process. As one Gender Consultant noted, *"The team makes the effort to come together for training sessions and workshops, which is an ideal opportunity to socialize the gender strategy,"* indicating how planned events can be leveraged for strategic implementation.

With support from the global gender equality lead at A360 and global gender consultants at Kore Global, Gender Champions and Consultants meet quarterly to report on progress against the implementation plan and country roadmaps. This ensures that activities remain on track and identifies areas where support or more resources are needed.

FOCUSING ON GIRLS' AGENCY AND EMPOWERMENT

At the core of A360's programming is an emphasis on building girls' agency and empowering them to define and act on their goals. Each country-specific program has integrated this focus in unique ways. For example, [Smart Start](#) aims to empower married girls in Ethiopia by linking family planning to their economic aspirations through financial counseling with girls and their husbands. [Matasa Matan Arewa \(MMA\)](#) in northern Nigeria provides adolescent girls with access to contraception and builds their knowledge and skills on SRH, soft skills, and financial literacy through *Life, Family, Health* classes. In Kenya, [Binti Shupavu](#) sessions equip girls with the knowledge and skills to make informed decisions about their futures. These practical applications demonstrate how A360 has translated its gender strategy into tangible actions that directly increase adolescent girls' agency and empowerment.

By implementing these strategies across individual programs, organizational structures, and MEL systems, A360 strives to move beyond simply stating principles to actively operationalizing and applying its gender strategy to achieve more gender transformative outcomes for adolescent girls.

According to Fifi Ogbondeminu, A360's Global Director:

"Gender equality is not a one-time leap but a journey of intentional steps. Every policy we shift, every voice we amplify, and every bias we challenge is a victory. We need to learn to embrace progress over perfection—taking one step at a time and celebrating each milestone is a foundation for lasting change."

TOP TIPS

Based on the experience and knowledge A360 gained in developing, implementing, and refreshing its Gender Strategy, the following tips may be useful to other program practitioners:

- 1. Embrace a participatory process:** Prioritize co-creation and collaboration in developing and refreshing your gender strategy. Involve diverse stakeholders, including program staff, community members, and, crucially, the girls, women, or gender-diverse individuals you aim to serve. As demonstrated by A360's mid-term refresh, participatory processes lead to strategies that are more relevant, contextually appropriate, and have greater buy-in.
- 2. Integrate gender equality throughout the program:** Avoid treating gender equality as a standalone issue. Instead, weave gender equality considerations into every aspect of your program, from design and implementation to monitoring and evaluation. A360's experience shows that gender equality is most effectively advanced when it is integrated into all facets of the program.
- 3. Maintain a utilization focus:** Ensure that your gender strategy translates into concrete actions and measurable outcomes. Develop detailed implementation plans with clear timelines, responsibilities, and budgets. A360's detailed one-year implementation plan exemplifies the importance of moving beyond aspirational goals to practical steps.
- 4. Stay rooted in local context:** Contextualize your approaches to reflect the specific cultural, social, and economic environments in which you work. A360's emphasis on localization, especially in its mid-term refresh, highlights the importance of this balance between global and local realities.
- 5. Involve senior leadership:** Secure buy-in and active participation from senior leadership to ensure that the gender strategy receives the necessary resources and support.
- 6. Create moments for pause and reflection:** Regularly schedule time for teams to pause, reflect on progress, and make necessary adjustments to the gender strategy. A360's refresh process and ongoing adaptive implementation highlight the value of reflection.

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