



**UN
TRUST
FUND** TO END
VIOLENCE
AGAINST WOMEN
AND GIRLS

30 YEARS

MABEL BIANCO

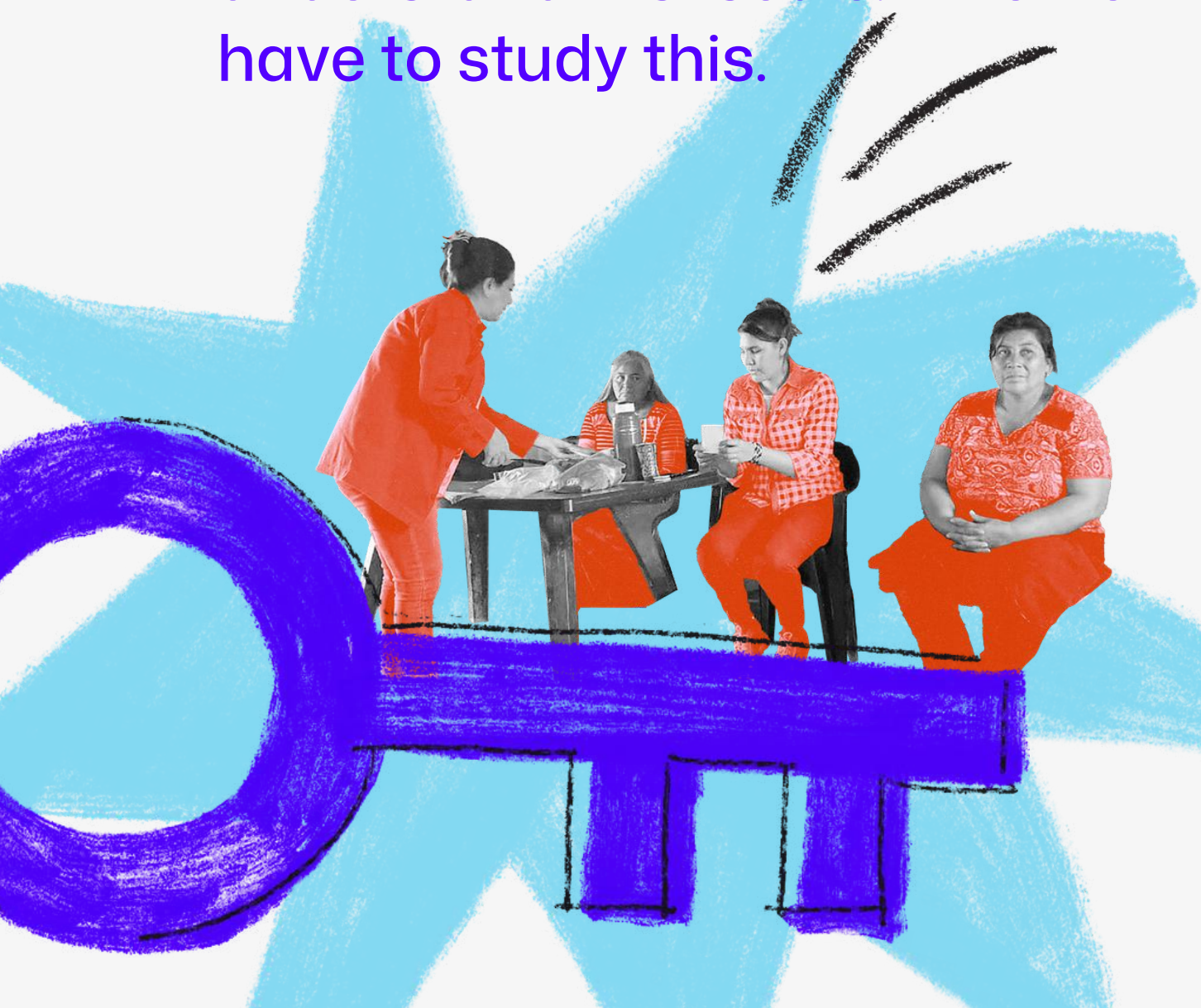
Fundación Estudio e
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(Argentina)



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In 2016, walking through a photography exhibition in Buenos Aires about child brides in India, I found a small section on Latin America tucked away in the basement. There were three photographs from Argentina. I stopped.

Child marriage was barely recognized as an issue in my country, yet there it was. My immediate reaction was to understand what was really behind those photographs. If this was really happening, we needed to document it and understand its scale. I remember thinking: we have to study this.



We began by analyzing census data and confirmed that child marriage was indeed happening in Argentina.

But that raised much bigger questions: who were the girls most at risk, what was driving it in their communities, and what would it take to prevent it?

At the time, there was very little funding available to take that work further.



In 2019, support from the UN Trust Fund made that possible. It allowed us to work directly with Indigenous women, teachers and local leaders to understand the risks girls were facing and develop a community-based risk-assessment methodology that is still used today to identify girls at risk and help prevent child marriage.

The work did more than document the problem; it gave local actors a way to act on it.

I had seen this pattern before. A decade earlier, in 2009, the UN Trust Fund had supported our work on the connection between violence and HIV across Latin America, when that relationship was still barely recognized in the region. For some women living with HIV, the work helped them understand for the first time that what they had experienced had a name: violence. The evidence changed not only how the problem was understood, but also the way health systems responded. Doctors came to see that medical treatment alone could not succeed if violence continued in a woman's life.





For me, this is where the UN Trust Fund has been different. It has been willing to invest when the problem is already real in women's and girls' lives, but the evidence and recognition are still emerging. Sometimes progress means working before all the answers are clear, making overlooked realities visible and building the evidence needed to act. That takes courage and willingness to work with uncertainty, but it can ultimately change what becomes possible for women and girls.

After so many years in this work, that is also what gives me hope. I believe the progress we need is possible because we have achieved it before. We have seen issues once dismissed or unseen become recognized, and recognition become rights and protections. The rights women and girls have today did not simply appear; they were fought for and won. Now we have to protect that progress, renew the effort behind it, and refuse to let backlash take us backwards.



Dr. Mabel Bianco is an Argentine physician, epidemiologist and feminist leader who has spent more than three decades advancing women's health, sexual and reproductive rights, and gender equality across Latin America. She founded FEIM in 1989 and has led the organization for over 35 years, combining research and advocacy to make hidden forms of violence against women visible and to push institutions to act on them. She headed Argentina's national HIV/AIDS programme in 2000–2001.

