



POLICY PAPER JULY 2016

ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE BY 2030 TRACKING PROGRESS AND IDENTIFYING GAPS



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Acknowledgements

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COVER IMAGE: Blurb: and caption for inside cover: Sunita with her two young children in India. "I am a mother; that's what I need to be. I became a mother early but I feel good when my girls are around. They bring me joy. I didn't have the mind to think what I should do, what shouldn't I do. I was too upset when I was taken to get married. I used to think of my Dad a lot. Why did he do this to me? Why did he do this?" Name changed to protect identity. © 2013 Suzy Sainovski/World Vision Australia

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Our safeguarding policy prevents us from showing the faces of any girls affected by early marriage. All images used were taken with permission from similar contexts and are not linked to the specific stories in this report. All quotes displayed in this report were given anonymously and are attributable by gender, age and location only.

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ABOVE Students in Bangladesh play in the mustard fields before class. School enables girls to reach their full potential, close down gender gaps in education, and delay the age of marriage. © Xavier Sku/World Vision

Executive summary

This paper is intended to shed light on the progress DFID and civil society have made in ending child marriage in the two years following the Girl Summit in July 2014. The summit was co-hosted by the UK and UNICEF and aimed to mobilise domestic and international efforts to end female genital mutilation (FGM) and child, early and forced marriage (CEFM) within a generation.

Good progress has been made in raising child marriage up the international agenda and DFID and others have ensured that the issue is now considered seriously around the world. However, with the introduction of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the commitment within them to end child marriage by 2030, it is clear that significant scaling up of efforts is needed to meet the challenge. Additionally, while DFID can be congratulated for much of its work on child marriage, a clear strategic framework for ensuring success in tackling child marriage abroad, in line with the SDG process, is important for maintaining ongoing leadership on this issue.

We recognise the progress made by DFID and civil society since the Girl Summit in July 2014, but would like to highlight the challenges and gaps faced in ending child marriage by 2030. It argues that DFID has a key role in ensuring ending child marriage remains at the top of the international policy agenda, and through this, is eradicated by 2030 by:

- Demonstrating global leadership by encouraging and supporting other countries that have a high prevalence of child marriage to adopt national action plans to end child marriage;
- Supporting the domestic implementation of the SDGs by arguing for them to be included in the 2015-2020 single department plan for all government departments, which would act as an example to other countries;
- Scaling up mechanisms for civil society funding to end child marriage to meet the current demand (as registered in programmes such as AmplifyChange);
- Mainstreaming child marriage, education and ending Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) programmes across its entire portfolio in line with ICAI's recent recommendation.¹

DFID have played a key role in raising the issue of child marriage, now they must see this progress through and ensure an end to the practice by 2030.

¹ ICAI: DFID's Efforts to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Girls, May 2016

Introduction

Child marriage is a grave violation of children's rights and a brutal curtailment of childhood. It forces children into responsibilities for which they lack the emotional and physical maturity. Its impacts can be severe, ranging from high infant and child mortality and sexual and reproductive health complications, to dropping out of school, domestic violence, social isolation and entrenched poverty.

The development sector and wider international community have made significant progress in tackling child marriage in recent years², including advocacy and awareness raising, analysis of causes, commissioning of a large variety of interventions³, and driving the issue up the international policy agenda. The UK Government, in particular the Department for International Development (DFID), as well as UK-based INGOs in the *Girls Not Brides UK*⁴ partnership, have been important leaders of this work. Strong commitments were made two years ago at the Girl Summit aimed at mobilising domestic and international efforts to end female genital mutilation (FGM) and child, early and forced marriage (CEFM)⁵ within a generation.

CHILD MARRIAGE: A SNAP SHOT

- Every year, 15 million girls are married before the age of 18⁶. Although boys are also affected by early marriage, girls are disproportionately affected and form the majority of child spouses⁷.
- Child marriage is rooted in gender inequality; and can be sustained through entrenched discriminatory social norms, poverty, lack of education or even due to misplaced perceptions of providing protection for girls during a time of increased instability⁸ when girls are at a higher risk of physical or sexual abuse.
- Child marriage violates girls' rights to health, education and equality. It exposes girls to violence throughout their lives, and traps them in a cycle of poverty.

Child marriage is a truly global problem that cuts across countries, continents, cultures and religions. Child brides can be found in every region of the world from the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Latin America to Europe.⁹ Countries with a high prevalence of child marriage feel the negative economic and social impacts as women and girls face barriers to reaching their potential, draining communities and nations of innovation and prosperity.

A recent report from the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) praised DFID's work on eliminating Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) internationally. It highlighted DFID's strong global policy leadership, through initiatives such as the 2014 Girl Summit, and the department's contribution to expanding the evidence base on what works in preventing and responding to abuse, including on global challenges such as child marriage and FGM.¹⁰ However, the report also raised concerns that DFID's programming, although innovative and of high quality, is nevertheless small in scale compared to the challenge faced in ending child marriage.

Globally, child marriage rates are slowly declining. However, unless the efforts to tackle child marriage are significantly increased, the international community will miss its target to end child marriage by 2030 as envisioned in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as targets related to gender equality, empowerment of women and girls, education and poverty reduction.

This briefing, therefore, will attempt to identify the challenges that DFID and sector wide organisations face in ending child marriage globally in the hope of further building on the progress the department and its partners in the sector have made so far.

THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND THE IMPORTANCE OF ENGAGING WOMEN AND GIRLS

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted in September 2015 and launched in January 2016. These Goals, which are intended to address the gaps left behind after the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), will aim to achieve three extraordinary things by 2030: ending poverty, combating climate change and fighting justice and inequality.

Included in the goals is a target on ending child marriage to be realised by 2030:

“Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilations”

² ICAI: DFID's Efforts to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Girls, May 2016

³ Empowering Girls: What the Commonwealth can do to end child marriage

⁴ *Girls Not Brides UK: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage* is a global partnership of over 600 civil society organisations from more than 80 countries committed to ending child marriage and enabling girls to reach their full potential. *Girls Not Brides UK* is a national partnership of UK-based members of the global partnership.

⁵ This will be referred to as child marriage throughout the document.

⁶ *Girls Not Brides UK*: <http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/about-child-marriage/>

⁷ World Vision UK Research Report: Untying the Knot: Exploring Early Marriage in Fragile States

⁸ An example being the increased rates of child marriage in refugee communities in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey following the Syria conflict

⁹ *Girls Not Brides UK*: <http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/about-child-marriage/>

¹⁰ ICAI: DFID's Efforts to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Girls, May 2016

Progress

The Girl Summit, co hosted by the UK Government and UNICEF in London in July 2014, built on a growing understanding that child marriage holds back millions of girls globally from reaching their full potential, and galvanised global momentum to end child marriage within a generation.

DFID: commitments and achievements

DFID placed themselves at the forefront of the agenda to end child marriage at the Girl Summit in 2014. The table below details international commitments made by the Government, including commitments made by DFID to tackle child marriage at the Girl Summit 2014, and progress made against these commitments:

Commitments made (international action- July 2014)	Progress (July 2016)
Commitment to contribute up to £25million for a new UN multi-country programme in 12 countries to end CEFM. Projected end date: March 2020.	The UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage, developed after Girl Summit 2014, aims to reduce child marriage and respond to the needs of girls who marry. https://devtracker.dfid.gov.uk/projects/GB-I-204496/ ¹¹ Of the 12 countries targeted in the programme (Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Yemen and Zambia) six countries – Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Nepal, Uganda, and Zambia - have adopted national action plans that either specifically address child marriage or national strategic plans with specific elements on child marriage. ¹² Dev Tracker: https://devtracker.dfid.gov.uk/projects/GB-I-204496/documents . The remaining countries, with the exception of Yemen, are currently developing plans.
Investment of £31 million over eight years, focused on generating new evidence on what works to transform the lives of poor adolescent girls, including addressing harmful social norms and CEFM. ¹³	Implementation phase, 26.68 per cent funded Planned end date: 21st March 2020 ¹⁴
New mechanisms to be developed for civil society funding for addressing FGM and CEFM.	The demand for AmplifyChange ¹⁵ grants far exceeds existing funding. AmplifyChange estimates that 2000 proposals have been received that meet the funding requirements. However, only 35 per cent of eligible applications can currently be supported through funding committed to date. ¹⁶

Good progress is clearly being made against its 2014 commitments. However the table above illustrates that, although programmes are of high quality, as noted by the ICAI report¹⁷, demand outstrips funding, reflected by the fact that only 35 per cent of worthy applications for AmplifyChange grants can currently be supported through funding that has been committed to date.¹⁸

DFID has also made good progress through its work in developing action plans as part of the Accelerating Action against Child Marriage programme to eradicate child marriage in 12 target countries (detailed in the table above). National Action Plans reaffirm and strengthen commitments to end child marriage and hold national governments to account.

¹¹ <https://devtracker.dfid.gov.uk/projects/GB-I-204496/>

¹² Dev Tracker: <https://devtracker.dfid.gov.uk/projects/GB-I-204496/documents>

¹³ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/funding-for-what-works-to-prevent-violence-against-women-and-girls>

¹⁴ Dev Tracker: <https://devtracker.dfid.gov.uk/projects/GB-I-204496>

¹⁵ AmplifyChange is a DFID supported a fund which aims to empower young people, men and women to realise their sexual and reproductive rights.

¹⁶ Dev Tracker: <https://devtracker.dfid.gov.uk/projects/GB-I-204496/documents>

¹⁷ ICAI: DFID's Efforts to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Girls, May 2016

¹⁸ <https://devtracker.dfid.gov.uk/projects/GB-I-204496/documents>

Civil society: achievements and challenges

PRACTICAL APPROACHES TO ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE

Girls Not Brides UK members use a range of approaches which have proven successful in raising community awareness of the harmful effects of child marriage, and changing attitudes towards the practice. Examples include:

- A focus on birth registration – this ensures that children not only know but have documented evidence of their age and can prove this to the relevant authorities;
- Challenging prevailing social norms in communities that support child marriage– through working with faith leaders, community leaders, parents, teachers and children themselves it is possible to change established attitudes towards child marriage, highlight the negative effects the practice has on girls and their wider community, and raise awareness of the law where child marriage is illegal;
- Child Protection Clubs – these clubs for boys and girls can provide children with knowledge of their rights and empower them to take action, including negotiating directly with parents and community leaders to protect girls from child marriage;
- Education, life skills, comprehensive sexuality education, and girls' empowerment programmes – these programmes can address cross-cutting issues which are intertwined with child marriage.

At the Girl Summit, civil society organisations, including *Girls Not Brides UK* members, pledged to continue to work to end child marriage, including by raising awareness and advocating for the implementation of laws at a national and international level. In addition to this, *Girls Not Brides UK* members called for sustainable funding and programming and urged governments to learn from the work of civil society organisations that have been addressing the issue of child marriage for many years.¹⁹

Two years later, the progress made has been significant. The Girl Summit provided momentum for advocacy and campaigning around child marriage and for sharing evidence of successful programming and action to tackle the issue. By taking a holistic approach to changing negative social norms and addressing gender inequality that are the root causes of child marriage, members of *Girls Not Brides UK* have been working across communities, genders, faith and local and national governments to end child marriage.

CASE STUDY: PROGRAMMING APPROACHES – CHANNELS OF HOPE²⁰

Channels of Hope is a programming approach used by World Vision that engages faith leaders, particularly Christian and Muslim, to develop and encourage a scriptural basis for positive social norm changes within their communities. As leading figures in many communities, faith leaders are in a unique position to act as a catalyst for change.

This approach has been used to tackle issues including preventing child marriage, the stigma around HIV & AIDS, gender based violence and promoting child protection. For example, in Malawi Christian leaders who had been through the programme reported that they had subsequently been proactive in helping to prevent child marriage in their congregations and communities.²¹

In many contexts such faith-focused programming can also be critically important during and after humanitarian emergencies in addressing emerging challenges, including community vulnerability to higher rates of child marriage.

CASE STUDY: PROGRAMMING APPROACHES – FOOTBALL FOR CHANGE

Plan International UK are working to end child marriage and FGM through football in Tanzania. The project works with community leaders, parents and girls and boys to promote girls rights and prevent child marriage and FGM. The programme sets up girls and boys football teams and trains coaches with innovative football drills that encourage discussion of girls' rights. The drills address gender equality, girls' rights to decision making, sexual health and reproductive rights issues. Through the drills girls and boys discuss the causes and effects of FGM and child marriage; how to respond to community pressure, and the ways that they can seek help and protection when facing these harmful practices.

Football tournaments between the teams also provide a chance to share their messages to a wider audience of supporters and audiences who come to watch. The drills aim to promote behavioural change in relationships between girls and boys, and so far the project has found an increase in levels of knowledge among girls and boys involved in the football teams.

¹⁹ *Girls Not Brides UK*: <http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/next-girl-summit/>

²⁰ World Vision International: <http://www.wvi.org/health/publication/channels-hope>

²¹ World Vision UK report: Learning from the Implementation of Channels of Hope for Child Protection in Malawi September 2015

Future opportunities, gaps and challenges in ending child marriage

The decision to include a target to end child marriage in the SDGs was particularly welcome. It will not only help to monitor progress on reducing child marriage globally, it will help catalyse efforts towards achieving a number of the proposed goals on education, poverty, nutrition, economic growth and reduction of inequality.

However, while this is a huge achievement, there are gaps that remain that must be addressed to successfully end child marriage by 2030. Governments and donors must continue to champion ending child marriage, while at the same time ensure they maximise impact through scaling up programmes on VAWG and gender equality, mainstreaming child protection and recognising and combating the added vulnerabilities of fragile contexts.

The Sustainable Development Goals

The United Nations called the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) “the most successful anti-poverty movement in history” and while they were successful in lifting millions out of poverty, the needs of adolescent girls were not addressed, including through a failure to set benchmarks for tackling child marriage.

BELOW: Women in Somaliland walk home after their weekly check-up and rations from a World Vision-funded clinic; 45 per cent of girls across Somalia are married before the age of 18. © Ashley Jonathan Clements/World Vision



The SDGs are seeking to address this through target 5.3 to “eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilations” under goal 5: “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”. Moreover, the inclusion of a target to end child marriage should also have a mutually reinforcing effect on the achievement of many other goals in the SDG framework by 2030, including:

GOAL	LINK TO CHILD MARRIAGE TARGET
Goal 1 No Poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many parents chose to marry daughters off as a way of achieving economic security. In fact, the opposite happens as child marriage helps to perpetuate poverty by reducing educational and employment opportunities for women and girls.
Goal 2 Zero hunger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food insecurity is both a cause and consequence of child marriage. Daughters are often married young as a way to relieve financial burdens on households, meaning they have one less mouth to feed. However, child brides are more likely to suffer from malnutrition compared with girls who marry later in life. Children born to child brides are more likely to die due to low birth weights.
Goal 3 Good health and wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mounting evidence shows that child marriage is detrimental to girls' health. The majority (90 per cent) of adolescent pregnancies take place within marriage. Pregnancy and childbirth are dangerous for girls: they are the 2nd leading cause of death for girls age 15-19. When girls survive childbirth, they can be left with devastating injuries such as obstetric fistula.²²
Goal 4 Inclusive & equitable quality education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child marriage is a significant barrier to girls education, often causing girls to drop out of school Girls who are married young have lower levels of education. Girls who have no education are three times as likely to marry by 18 as those with a secondary or higher education.²³ Efforts to improve girls' education will only be successful if they also address child marriage, gender based violence and gender inequality
Goal 8 Economic Growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When girls are able to go to school, learn the skills they need to secure a job, and have access to the same economic opportunities as boys, they will be better able to support themselves and their families and help to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty. Addressing child marriage will open new economic opportunities for girls, their families and their countries.
Goal 10 Reduce inequalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child marriage is symptomatic of gender inequality globally. UNICEF estimates that 700 million women alive today were married before 18. That's nearly 10 per cent of the world's population. Once a girl is married at an early age she is held back from many opportunities, her health and education suffer, and her economic opportunities narrow. Child brides are also more likely to endure violence at the hands of their husbands or in-laws due in part to greater age differences between spouses. We will not achieve gender inequality as long as child marriage continues.
Goal 16 Peace, justice & strong institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong laws and policies are essential to protect girls from child marriage and enable them to fulfil their potential. However, laws only work if people know they exist, support them and there are strong systems in place to enforce them. Tackling child marriage by strengthening birth and marriage registration systems, as well as working with communities and institutions at all levels to understand and effectively apply the law, will help us build a fairer world for all.

²² An obstetric fistula is a hole between the vagina and rectum or bladder that is caused by prolonged obstructed labour, leaving a woman incontinent of urine or faeces or both. For women with obstructed labour, labour that goes unattended, the labour can last up to six or seven days.

²³ United Nations Population Fund, *Marrying Too Young: End Child Marriage*, 2012

The implementation of the SDGs will require a different approach to sustainable development from the UK Government. Unlike the MDGs, the SDGs are universal, meaning all states and not just low income countries are committed to their implementation, both domestically as well as externally. Currently national reporting to any international body on domestic progress towards the SDGs is voluntary²⁴. This means that governments, including the UK, are accountable to their own citizens through national parliaments and other such bodies. Reporting, monitoring and accountability requirements around the SDGs are opaque however, which risks limiting progress on achieving the SDGs. Equally it is important that the UK encourages a robust process whereby other countries are tracking their progress in meeting the SDG targets.

Increasing DFID's impact on child marriage

Girls Not Brides UK members echo the concerns expressed in the ICAI report regarding the limited scale and reach of DFID's programming, restricting its ability to tackle child marriage and VAWG more widely. While *Girls Not Brides UK* members believe the Girl Summit in 2014 increased positive rhetoric in ending child marriage and galvanised civil society and political will to end child marriage, this has not necessarily transformed into sufficient DFID programming at a local level.

Girls Not Brides UK advocate more funding for direct programmes, mainstreaming gender and ending Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) work into other areas, as well as increasing the number of gender experts in DFID to provide support for this, as central to scaling up DFID's programming aimed at tackling child marriage.

Mainstreaming child protection into programmes

Wider development-sector thinking should consider the effects of child marriage if investments made by donors such as DFID are going to be worthwhile and sustainable. For instance, girls who give birth at age 15 are five times more likely to die during delivery than women in their 20s. A 10 per cent reduction in child marriage could contribute to a 70 per cent reduction in maternal mortality and a 3 per cent reduction in infant mortality rates²⁵. Tackling child protection issues including harmful practices, and their link to health and education outcomes cannot be overlooked.

World Vision Sierra Leone reported that the links between poor education, child marriage and infant and maternal mortality (highest in teenage mothers) were not recognised in the Government of Sierra Leone's post-Ebola Recovery Strategy, which is supported by DFID. They argued that this strategy should take into account the increased number of vulnerable children²⁶ that have been put at risk as a result of the crisis, including child brides.

Equally, in countries and regions with large youth populations like Sierra Leone, more must be done to encourage a youth-focused and youth-lead approach to development, recognising that girls and boys, young women and young men, are well placed to identify the challenges they face. While DFID is supporting the Government of Sierra Leone in the areas of education and health, without a concerted effort to also tackle child marriage within those sectors the benefits of investing in them will not be as sustainable.

FEAR IN FRAGILE CONTEXTS, A MAJOR CAUSE OF CHILD MARRIAGE

Early marriage is often perceived as a protective measure and used as a community response to crisis. Fear of rape and sexual violence, of unwanted pregnancies outside marriage, of family shame and dishonour, of homelessness and hunger or starvation were all reported by parents and children as legitimate reasons for early marriage in a range of fragile contexts.²⁷

In fragile contexts, state justice systems often lack legitimacy and there may be gaps and differences between formal and customary laws and practice. Often recognising customary laws and practice over and above the national law, communities may establish or reinforce existing behavioural or gender norms which may not be conducive to child protection. Fear of negative consequences of transgressing these norms – social stigma, isolation and informal penalties – ensure that early marriage continues to thrive in some contexts and is often seen as a respectable tradition endowed with social prestige.²⁸

The UK is one of the largest donors of official humanitarian aid. DFID recognises the impact of recurrent humanitarian crises on its development work and has prioritised building the resilience of the very poorest through tackling food insecurity and improving livelihoods. In order to tackle child marriage and achieve the SDGs, a similar approach must be taken by DFID to mainstream early marriage and VAWG prevention in humanitarian response.

²⁴ Sustainable Development Solutions Network: <http://unsdsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/150320-SDSN-Indicator-Report.pdf>

²⁵ UNICEF: <http://www.unicef.org/mdg/childmortality.html>

²⁶ Plan International: <http://www.plan-uk.org/assets/Documents/pdf/Childrens-Ebola-Recovery-Assessment-Sierra-Leone.pdf>

²⁷ World Vision UK Research Report: Untying the Knot: Exploring Early Marriage in Fragile States

²⁸ World Vision UK Research Report: Untying the Knot: Exploring Early Marriage in Fragile States

Conclusions and recommendations

DFID can be proud of its record on ending child marriage. The Girl Summit in 2014 highlighted DFID's strong global policy leadership on this issue. However, it is clear that in order to capitalise on the progress made, DFID must scale up its programming approach to ending child marriage.

DFID has an ongoing significant role to play in leveraging its global influence and encouraging major donors and the international community to scale up efforts to end child marriage. Unless these efforts increase, the international community is at risk of missing its target to end child marriage by 2030 as envisioned in the SDGs. This in turn will affect targets on gender equality, empowerment of women and girls and poverty reduction.

To ensure child marriage remains on the international agenda, and that it is eradicated by 2030, we make the following five key recommendations to the UK government:

1. Encourage and support high prevalence countries through direct programming, and continue to work alongside other countries to develop national action plans tailored to specific contexts for tackling child marriage and tracking progress;
2. Ensure UK domestic implementation of the SDGs is included in the 2015-2020 single department plan for all government departments and ensure that all government departments understand the gravity and importance of achieving the SDGs by 2030 by developing a national action plan for implementing and monitoring the SDGs, including the elimination of child marriage, in the UK context;
3. Scale up mechanisms for civil society funding for addressing child marriage to ensure that DFID programmes have wide reach as well as a high quality;
4. Mainstream child marriage prevention into education, health, and ending Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) programmes across its entire portfolio, to prevent child marriage and support girls who are already married;
5. Ensure child marriage prevention is part of UK emergency and humanitarian responses.

Opposite page: A 17 year old on her walk to school, she lives in the Amhara region of Ethiopia. She was married at 12, but her marriage was deemed illegal by local authorities. She has missed a lot of school and says she is worried that she will never catch up.



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