

Learning series session: Child marriage and the Sustainable Development Goals -Progress and opportunities for accelerated action

Notes and related resources, October 2023

Key takeaways

- The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) cannot be addressed in isolation achieving them all requires a coordinated, multidimensional approach that prioritises child marriage^a and girls' rights. This means assessing the connections within and between the SDGs, and considering the positive effects they can have on each other:
 - Child marriage is integral to achieving at least nine of the SDGs; we cannot end child marriage without also considering poverty, hunger, education, gender equality, decent work and economic growth, reduced inequalities, climate action and peace.
 - Advocacy particularly around access to justice and minimum age of marriage laws should be inclusive and intersectional to avoid violating one right in favour of another. A differentiated legal, financial and social support framework is needed for ever-married girls (that is, those who are married, divorced, separated or widowed) to exercise their rights.
 - This work will require investment and collaboration within and between governments, nongovernmental organisations and civil society.
- Work to address child marriage and advance girls' rights needs to focus on norms change and happen at all levels of the socioecological model – individual, family, community and systems. This should include reflection on our own attitudes and behaviours, and consider social media and peer influence over girls' decisions alongside work in school, and with parents and community leaders. Education is key to building girls' and boys' knowledge, skills and aspirations – interventions need to begin early to support girls to imagine their lives differently. Complex legal frameworks require advocacy for reform on multiple fronts.
- Focusing on peace rather than the costs of child marriage or war is a powerful entry point to ٠ advance girls' rights in settings affected by conflict, crisis, long-term instability and widespread rights violations. From this perspective, addressing child marriage contributes to peace, gender equality, and economic and political participation for all; addressing child marriage also reduces costs for the health and judicial systems. Strengthening rights-based legal, protection and response services – including birth registration – is key to addressing child marriage during crisis; it is also an investment in peace and non-violence, as child marriage is a form of gender-based violence (GBV), and those with no legal identity are targets for child marriage and extremism.

^a The term "child marriage" refers to all forms – formal or informal – of child, early and forced marriage and unions where at least one party is under age 18.

Overview of progress on SDGs – Rachael Hongo, Girls Not Brides

Halfway to the SDG deadline, we are not on track:

- About half of the 140 targets are moderately or severely off track.
- Over 30% have seen no movement or sunk below the 2015 baseline.
- Polycrisis threatening process: conflict, climate change, COVID-19.
- Need to address child marriage or we will not meet at least 9 of the SDGs; and we will not end child marriage unless we address the other SDGs.

<u>Goal 5: Gender equality</u> – includes target to end child marriage, gender equality is essential to all SDGs, and all SDGs are essential to gender equality:

- Only 15.4% of indicators are on track.
- 1 in 5 girls marry before age 18, impacting on health, education, and economic and political participation.
- Girls who marry under age 15 are 50% more likely to experience intimate partner violence (IPV).
- Low representation of women in national (26.5%) and local government (35.4%).
- Solutions:
 - Address social norms and child marriage to reduce violence and ensure girls' and women's voices and decisions are valued.
 - Engage communities including boys and men to support girls' participation and wellbeing.
 - Include more women in key decision-making spaces, so they can legislate in favour of girls and women gender quotas are effective for reaching equality politics.

<u>Goal 1: No poverty</u> – child marriage is a cause and consequence of poverty, and perpetuates it across generations

- Only 1/3 countries will meet the target to halve national poverty levels.
- Polycrisis has pushed up to 95 million people into extreme poverty, and girls in the countries and households with the lowest and most insecure incomes are most likely to marry almost double the global average.
- Women who married before age 18 lose about 9% of earnings over their lifetime.
- Progress has mainly been among girls from the richest households they account for 3 times more averted child marriages than girls from the poorest households.
- Solutions:
 - Pursue active, inclusive labour market policies that emphasise decent work for women.
 - Social norms change to remove barriers to work (e.g. unpaid care work).
 - Gender-responsive budgets and social assistance.

• Progressive, redistributive global financial governance framework.

Goal 2: Zero hunger

- Food insecurity and malnutrition are a cause and consequence of child marriage.
- Girls who experience food insecurity are more likely to marry before 18, to reduce pressure and access limited supplies, especially during conflict.
- 1 in 3 people worldwide experience food insecurity; hunger levels are the highest since 2005.
- Children born to girls under 15 are more likely to have low birth weight, poor nutrition, experience stunting, and die before age 5.
- Solutions:
 - Ensure gender-equitable access to productive resources.
 - Ensure all families, children, young people and women are included in decisions around accessing affordable and nutritious food, especially during conflict and crisis.

Goal 3: Good health and wellbeing

- Nearly half of married women lack decision-making power over their sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).
- 90% of adolescent births happen within the context of marriage, and complications related to this are among the leading causes of maternal deaths for girls aged 15-19. There has been progress (reduced from 47% to 41% since 2015), but more is needed.
- Child marriage is associated with poor mental health outcomes emotional distress, depression, isolation.
- 381 million more people pushed into extreme poverty by out-of-pocket payments for health.
- Solutions:
 - o Advocate for flexible, stigma-free, youth-friendly SRHR services
 - Strengthen primary health care systems so they can respond to child marriage and other related issues.

Goal 4: Quality education

- Primary and secondary school completion rates are rising, but slowly and unevenly.
- 84 million children will be out of school by 2023.
- Girls who are out of school are more likely to marry before age 18; once married, girls are unlikely to return to school due to stigma, forced exclusion and social norms that keep them at home.
- One year of additional schooling can increase a woman's earnings by about 20%.
- Solutions:
 - Advocate to keep girls in school for at least 12 years, removing tuition fees and indirect costs.

- Invest in quality, inclusive and safe educational experiences and girls' transition to decent work.
- Ensure domestic financing for education is at least 4-6% of GDP and/or 15-20% of public expenditure.
- Address social norms and practices that prevent girls from going to and thriving at school.

Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth

- 1 in 4 young people are not in education or employment, and most of them are women, who are 2 times more likely to be out of education or employment as men.
- Girls who marry young have limited decision-making power and face multiple barriers to participating in the economy many are forced into the unregulated informal economy.
- Child marriage keeps young people from contributing to the growth of greener, more equitable economies, and costs the world trillions of dollars.
- Solutions:
 - Decouple economic growth from environmental damage.
 - Ensure economic growth is more inclusive.

Goal 10: Reduced inequalities

- Child marriage is most common among those who have been most marginalised and excluded due to gender, age, race, class, ethnicity or location.
- Girls from these populations face more barriers to access the services and resources they need.
- COVID-19 triggered the largest increase in between-country inequality in three decades.
- Solutions:
 - $\circ~$ Intersectional and gender-transformative approaches to address the root causes of marginalisation.

Goal 13: Climate action

- For every 10% change in rainfall due to climate change, child marriage increases 1%.
- Disrupting education and livelihoods (4 million girls will not complete their education because of climate-related events), and increasing fear of violence push girls into marriage.
- Girls who marry are less able to adapt and mitigate issues related to climate change.
- Solutions:
 - In climate actions, prioritise support for the girls who have been most marginalised those at risk of child marriage and girls who are or have been married (ever-married girls).
 - \circ Make gender equality and protection from GBV central priorities in climate action.
 - $\circ~$ Invest in actions to shock-proof the systems and services girls need.
 - Involve girls and young people in policymaking processes so they can hold governments accountable for their rights.

Goal 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions

- For every tenfold increase in conflict-related fatalities, child marriage increases 7%.
- Child marriage prevalence in states experiencing fragility is double the global average.
- 34.6 million refugees and 108.4 million people forcibly displaced in 2022 the latter up 250% in 10 years.
- A major challenge is lack of legal identify 1 in 4 children under age 5 have no legal identity greater child marriage, trafficking, sexual exploitation or forced labour.
- Solutions:
 - Implement strong legal and political frameworks that centre girls' rights beyond minimum age of marriage to ensure access to education, health, child protection, justice and divorce services, including during crisis.
 - Invest in evidence of the impact of laws, policies and programmes on the agency and rights of adolescent girls.

Overall solutions to work together to achieve all SDGs

- Assess the connections between different goals and the positive (multiplier) effects they can have on each other
- Prioritise child marriage in the 2030 Agenda for long-term change.
- Ensure all reporting on the SDGs is consistent, comprehensive and includes meaningful involvement from civil society.
- Commit to action by developing costed national and regional action plans to address child marriage, working across sectors and the development and humanitarian nexus.

Quality education and child, early and forced marriage and unions – Sushmita Mukherjee, Project Concern International, India

- Keeping girls in school is one of the best ways to prevent child marriage; child marriage is a significant barrier to girls' access to quality education In India, less than 2 in 10 married girls continue their education.
- Education is important to girls and boys it is foundational to the process of empowerment.
- Improvement in girls' education is the main reason India has been able to halve its child marriage prevalence over 20 years.

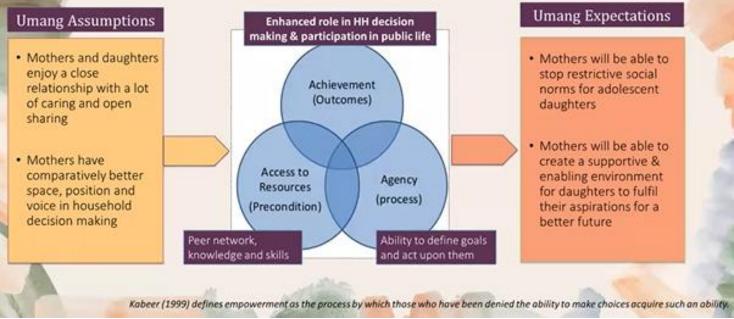
SDG 4 – Quality education

- Through access to quality, inclusive and equitable education for all, we can contribute to ending child marriage.
- Though child marriage is not explicitly mentioned in this Goal, with quality teaching, leadership and resources, girls' education unlocks choice for girls, building their knowledge, skills and aspirations.

• Child marriage is deeply connected with issues related to gender inequality, human rights and access to education.

Project Umang – PCI's experiences of delaying age of marriage

- Goal: Reduce prevalence of child marriage by 15-20% in high-prevalence districts in Jharkhand (where prevalence has declined to 32% but is still above the national average); empower girls.
- Look into the socioecological model to bring in mothers from women's collectives to influence societal-level shifts alongside individual- and family-level shifts.
- Baseline:
 - $\circ~$ 75% of mothers were married before 18.
 - $\circ~$ 85% of them had no role in deciding their own marriages.
- Empowerment framework: essential to take a normative and socioecological perspective to change:



Based on: Kabeer, N., 1999, <u>The conditions and consequences of choice: Reflections on the measurement of women's</u> <u>empowerment</u>

- Endline results showing changes in gender-discriminatory attitudes and norms:
 - 95% of girls were convinced they could resist marriage pressure and dissuade families (compared to 77% at baseline).
 - 12% of mothers expressed reservations about sending their daughters for higher studies, fearing this would delay their age of marriage (compared to 17% at baseline).
- Opportunities for accelerated action:
 - Programmes need to include a norms-shifting lens centring the rights of girls working with boys, peers and family members on respect and supporting positive role models.

- o Include pathways for employment and technology support.
- $\circ~$ Strengthen support structures for work around social norms.
- Invest in gender-disaggregated data collection.
- $\,\circ\,\,$ Ensure domestic financing for education is at least 4-6% of GDP and/or 15-20% of public expenditure.

Peace, justice and strong institutions and child marriage: Unravelling the complex web of child marriage in times of crisis – Ghida Anani, ABAAD, Lebanon

- Very timely to be talking about the intersection between child marriage and SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), as we are all affected by instability and armed conflict.
- Understanding this relationship is vital for all programming around child protection and GBV, to ensure we are mainstreaming Resolution 1325 (on Women, Peace and Security) and work to end child marriage.
- Child marriage is an invisible cost of war and natural disasters often seen as a solution for families trying to survive and protect their family members.
- Complex and multi-layered crises increases risks to girls and women prevalence in states experiencing fragility is double the global average need to address this issue in crisis situations.
- Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon (2022):
 - Rate of food insecurity increased sharply to 67%.
 - o 22% of girls aged 15-19 were already married at time of survey (less than a year).
 - \circ 97% of refugees had resorted to coping strategies to meet their food needs.
 - → Key to keep child marriage on our radar during times of non-peace/crisis, beyond pathways associated with social and religious norms.

Justice, strong institutions and child marriage – the impact of state failings

- Crisis, lack of a cohesive legal framework and failure of protection and response services can lead to trafficking happening under legalised child marriage we see this in emergency safe shelters.
- Lack of legal identify can trap children in cycles of exploitation, with some countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) legalising child marriage at 8 or 9 years.
- Lack of birth registration can provide cover for cross-border trafficking of children.
- Globally, child trafficking increased from 28-35% between 2014 and 2021. In 2020, 16% of trafficked girls were forced into marriage or begging.

ABAAD's multifaceted and multidimensional approach to child marriage

- Prevention and response work: Work on social norms, engage community and religious leaders, advocate for policy changes, combined with evidence-based knowledge generation.
 - $\circ~$ Provide support and specialised care for those affected.

• Prevention work focused on behaviour change with boys and men, parents, policies and legislation to shift harmful norms.

Accelerated progress on child marriage and SDG 16

- Looking at data gathered for SDG 16 approved government budget deviations are increasing.
- Opportunities, entry points: Legislation (strong child marriage laws, effective enforcement, avenues for redress and government support), education (gender equality and rights, a generation with the information they need), economic incentives (financial support to keep girls in school) – all are needed.
- Prerequisites for success: collaboration (governments, NGOs, civil society), resources (financial and human), community engagement (grassroots initiatives, community dialogues).
- If we talk about the cost of war, extremism, terrorism, climate change we are facing a lost generation (with unregistered births and marriages) that is invisible to the state, but is a target for extremism.
- For there to be peace we need to address child marriage Child marriage is one of the most dangerous, costly, invisible aspects of any war, and advancing SDG 16 can only happen when we work on interrelated approaches, without forgetting the legal aspects (like registration) to avoid a lost generation being engaged in conflicts in the future.

Advocating for the prioritisation of SDG Target 5.3 – Sophia Lane, Girls Not Brides

- SDG Summit Political Declaration adopted at UNGA in September 2023
 - Aims to reflect the collective commitment of world leaders to, and mark the halfway point towards, achieving the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.
 - Negotiated by and between governments.
 - Drafted in consultation/with input from UN Major Groups (including UN Women Major Group).
 - Language around gender equality is weak, and there is no mention of child marriage, even though we know at current rates of progress it will take another 300 years to end child marriage.
- In the lead-up to the Summit, violence against women and girls (VAWG) was identified by the UN as a cross-cutting topic for driving progress on the SDGs key for collective action child marriage is an example of VAWG.
- *Girls Not Brides* looking to get involved in the work of UN Women Major Group to influence UN processes and political declarations (including Summit of the Future, 2024); will be looking for input from *Girls Not Brides* member organisations in this process.
- High-level Political Forum central platform for follow up and review of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs:
 - \circ Annual in July.
 - Theme for 2024: Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda and eradicating poverty in times of multiple crises. Commission on the Status of Women also focuses on poverty in 2024.

- Will focus on SDGs 1 (poverty), 2 (hunger), 13 (climate), 16 (peace, justice, institutions) and 17 (partnership).
- Voluntary National Reviews (VNR) states report progress towards achieving SDGs:
 - Facilitate experience-sharing to accelerate the 2030 Agenda successes, challenges, lessons.
 - Strengthen government policies/institutions.
 - Involving multiple stakeholders (including civil society).
- National-level advocacy opportunities:
 - \circ Check if there will be government consultations with civil society in your country.
 - If there is not one, civil society can push for this it is a key part of the process governments committed to.
 - For states that have previously presented but are not this time advocate for addressing the gaps and challenges previously identified.
- What you can do:
 - o Girls Not Brides dedicated webinars on SDGs planned for 2024.
 - Hold governments accountable to commitments made in the SDG Summit Political Declaration.
 - $\circ~$ Influence upcoming HLPF and VNR processes.

Q&A and discussion

Need for integrated strategies that are implemented to address child marriage across the SDGs

Sushmita:

- Child marriage is a complex issue, related to the patriarchal way our societies operate. We need comprehensive approaches rather than linear and siloed programming to sustainably address the root causes of child marriage.
- We need to look into our own individual attitudes and how we can change them. Girls are attuned to having a certain role and fate by a certain time, and it is hard for them to trust or even imagine that a different life is possible.
- Education is an opportunity to get to know the world, to then make decisions about your life. Should be considered alongside economic independence and good health (holistic – social and economic security; physical, mental and spiritual health).
- Start working on changing attitudes and norms young don't wait until young people are 17 to start this work – so girls can develop, gain the skills, knowledge and support they need to envision and realise their goals and life projects.

<u>Ghida:</u>

- Change will never happen at the policy and legal framework level without work to transform discriminatory social norms.
- In Lebanon and other countries in the MENA region there are many diverse confessional groups which influences options for legal reform. In Lebanon there are 19 confessions and 17 laws regulating family relationships and the personal status code, meaning that to change the legal minimum age of marriage you need to advocate separately with each confession.
- Changing laws or policies means changing social norms, which in turn means working with girls and those who shape their attitudes and influence their decisions. Those who hold influence is changing: in addition to work with children and mothers, social media, peers in school, schools (as institutions) and the family are also important.
- In countries where there is economic crisis and constant instability, it does not work to talk about the cost of child marriage, war or rights violations because rights violations are normalised. The most effective entry point for work on child marriage is to make the case for peace. Peace means gender equality and no child marriage; it means everyone is economically involved and contributing. Peace also means fewer social problems, health or justice costs. Pushing the issue of child marriage needs this positive psychology approach.

Access to justice for women

Ghida:

- We can push for a unified civil marriage law, access to justice for everyone, but also need to consider those girls who are already married with very complex marriage contracts. We need to increase rights, without violating others.
- Need to use a systemic, rights-based, people-led and survivor-centred approach together to draft strategies.

Related resources

- UN General Assembly, 2023, <u>Political declaration of the high-level political forum on sustainable</u> <u>development convened under the auspices of the General Assembly</u>
- UN SDG Summit, 2023, *Taking solutions to scale through high impact initiatives*
- UN High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, <u>list of countries</u> who have presented their Voluntary National Reviews
- UN Human Rights documents and publications
- Girls Not Brides, 2023, <u>The Sustainable Development Goals and child marriage</u>
- Girls Not Brides, 2023, <u>We cannot meet the SDGs by 2030 unless we accelerate action to end child</u> <u>marriage</u>
- Girls Not Brides, 2022, Girls' education and child marriage

- The CRANK, 2023, <u>Research Spotlight: Addressing child marriage and supporting married girls in</u> <u>conflict- and crisis-affected settings</u>, Girls Not Brides and the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage
- UNICEF, 2023, Ending child marriage: A profile of progress in India

Learning opportunities

- <u>Webinar</u> on Voluntary National Reviews for Gender Equality and Women's Human Rights, on 14 November
- <u>Webinar</u> on the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development and Gender Equality, 28 November
- Girls Not Brides, n.d., Learning series on what works to end child marriage