



NEW VOWS: Empowering Communities to End Child Marriage



Case Studies, Best Practices, and Policy Recommendations from World Vision's Global Work

World Vision 

A close-up, profile shot of a woman with dark hair, looking upwards and to the right. She has a red bindi on her forehead and is wearing a red and gold striped sari. The background is blurred, showing other people in a crowd.

WorldVision is an international partnership of Christians whose mission is to follow our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in working with the poor and oppressed to promote human transformation, seek justice, and bear witness to the good news of the Kingdom of God. We pursue this mission through integrated, holistic commitment to community-based transformational development, emergency relief, advocating for justice, partnerships with churches and faith communities, public awareness, and witness to Jesus Christ by life, deed, word, and sign.

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Our child safeguarding policy prevents us from showing the faces of any girls affected by child marriage. All images of adolescent girls were taken with permission from similar contexts and are not linked to the specific stories in this report.

Foreword

My name is Dola. I am 15 years old. I am honored to write the introduction of this report on child marriage, which is a very common practice in my country, Bangladesh, where 59 percent of the girls are married and very often to older men.

I am a member of the Child Forum, a group of child leaders that conducts many activities to raise awareness to end child marriage through street drama, campaigns, and cultural activities. The Child Forum has stopped almost 200 child marriages. I am committed to stand up against this horrific practice.

In Bangladesh, 18 years is technically the minimum age of marriage for girls. Unfortunately, the law is rarely enforced and, in recent years, we have seen how the government has considered policies that would grant exceptions for child marriage, making it legal in some cases. We, as members of the Child Forum, are against that because this will put many girls at risk.

In my country, some parents, especially from traditional communities, believe that child marriage is a way of protecting their daughters. We always hear justifications that the marriage provides economical safety to the girls, so she will be taken care of, and that they will be safeguarded from harassment and sexual violence before girls reach puberty. Unfortunately, we know from many stories that this is not true. Families often do not know the negative and harmful effects of child marriage, including pregnancy at such a young age, which can lead to many complications as a girl's body will not be ready for childbirth. Such parents benefit from being educated on the severe and harmful effects of child marriage.

Child marriage is a very big problem and deprives girls from their education, health, and safety. Child marriage is harmful to both girls and boys, but girls face many more physical and mental challenges because of pregnancy. Child brides who have children are psychologically unprepared and ill-equipped to become mothers at such a young age. Besides this, the number of students who drop out of school is increasing day by day because of child marriage. I see this every day.

To create a better and safer world for children, we—the government, donors and the public—must take more actions to prevent child marriage. It is important to make the practice totally illegal, to educate parents not to marry off their daughters, and to mobilize communities to protect their girls from child marriage. We want a child-friendly environment for every child. We do not want to see a baby in a child's womb. This can be the starting point of creating a better and safer world for all children.

Dola,

*Young Leader for Ending Violence Against Children,
World Vision Bangladesh*



Dola, age 15,
World Vision Young Leader

Executive Summary

There are 650 million child brides alive today, found in every region of the world.¹ Child marriage is a fundamental violation of human rights that has somber implications for the global economy, peace and security, and the achievement of global development goals. Many factors contribute to the continuation of this practice, including poverty, fragility, unjust legal systems, and harmful social norms and traditions. Even in countries with laws meant to protect children from marrying before the age of 18, social and cultural norms that affirm child marriage often persist in contravention of national laws. In the last decade, progress has been made to end this practice, including an estimated 25 million child marriages that were prevented, but there is still work to be done.²

Core to WorldVision's mission is the sustained well-being of children within families and communities, with a strategic focus on reaching the most vulnerable. initiative to prevent violence wherever it occurs, "It Takes a World to End Violence Against Children," has been implemented in 76 countries, with national campaigns focused on ending child marriage in 17 of those countries.¹

This report compiles research and data from four unique contexts—Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Senegal, and Uganda—where WorldVision is working to address the issue of child marriage. In each of these countries, case studies were developed using firsthand accounts, a desk review of available data, and evidence of promising practices for the elimination of child marriage. From the collected stories, data, and research, six key themes emerged:

Empowering women and girls as key decision-makers and agents of change achieves long-lasting results. Giving women and girls a voice in all aspects of project design and implementation is essential for the success of child marriage programming.

Engaging men and boys provides greater support structures for girls to say "no" to child marriage. As a result of widespread gender inequality, men and boys hold greater social power and are often the ones who decide whether a child should be married. It is important to work with men and boys, alongside women and girls, to effectively end the practice of child marriage.

Involving faith leaders is critical for long-term cultural and social norm change. Religious leaders are respected messengers in their communities who uniquely influence social norms. By engaging local community and faith leaders, programming to end child marriage can have a broader impact.

Child marriage has varied and complex driving factors that require multi-sectoral solutions. The seven evidence-based INSPIRE³ strategies holistically address factors leading to violence against children, including child marriage. These strategies must be employed simultaneously to effectively end child marriage.

Education provides alternative pathways and increased opportunities for girls at risk of child marriage. Interventions to end child marriage should be coupled with the strengthening of education programs and capacity-building of local schools.

Community-led social accountability mechanisms are vital to ending the practice of child marriage. Providing avenues for advocacy is key to transformation and service delivery. National and local level advocacy is effective in a variety of contexts and can help state-society accountability and development coordination to end child marriage.

i The countries prioritizing child marriage include Afghanistan, Chad, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, Pakistan, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia

In 2015, member states of the United Nations, including the United States, adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a set of 17 global goals to end poverty, reduce violence, create more equal societies, and promote human flourishing. Goal five, focused on gender equality, includes a specific target to “eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation” (target 5.3). The U.S. government has an important role to play in contributing to this goal and ensuring an end to these harmful practices. We recommend the U.S. government take the following measures to strengthen its commitment to ending child marriage:

1. **Provide robust funding for programs that seek to prevent child marriage and meet the needs of married girls.** We recommend Congress maintain or increase funding dedicated to ending child marriage globally and require standardized outcome indicators to reflect progress across U.S. government agencies.
2. **Meaningfully include adolescent girls and young women** in all programming design and implementation. We recommend increased attention and support to girls' agency across the board, especially in the implementation and accountability mechanisms of any U.S. strategies or initiatives directly impacting them.
3. **Establish a cross-agency working group** to review existing strategies, structures, and indicators, and improve the coordination and effectiveness of U.S. government efforts to end child marriage globally. This multi-agency group should have high-level leadership from USAID and

include stakeholders from multiple agencies. Together, they should develop a biennial report for Congress on the status and progress of their efforts. This report should also include recommendations for ways to more strategically work with other governments, civil society, and the private sector.

4. **Demonstrate strong global leadership in committing to end child marriage by 2030.** The U.S. should prioritize the issue of child marriage in bilateral and multilateral settings, and utilize other diplomatic channels to end this harmful practice.
5. **Increase collaboration across U.S. government agencies** working to end child marriage, and support multisectoral approaches. Missions should be given oversight on how funding is packaged and awarded to reduce complexity and drive resources toward desired outcomes. Progress should be reported and shared transparently.
6. **Recognize child marriage as a significant barrier to women's economic empowerment** within the Women's Global Development and Prosperity (W-GDP) initiative and take measures to address the practice.
7. **Continue to report** the incidence of child marriage, the existence and implementation of laws against child marriage, and girls' access to education annually in the State Department's Human Rights Reports.



Introduction

Each year, 12 million girls are married before the age of 18. That's 23 girls every minute whose childhood, dreams, and education are cut short.⁴ The practice of child marriage—defined as a formal or informal union where one or both parties are under the age of 18—impacts girls across countries, cultures, and religions.⁵ In some contexts, girls may be married as early as seven years old, but child marriages occur most commonly in adolescence to an older man.ⁱⁱ Twenty-one percent of young women (ages 20-24) were married as children.⁶ This represents a four percent decrease from 10 years ago, driven predominantly by progress in India, which has the highest number of child brides in the world.

Despite global declines in the practice of child marriage, girls in countries with high levels of fragilityⁱⁱⁱ such as Niger, Bangladesh, and the Central African Republic are still married as children more than 60 percent of the time. Fragility, poverty, and displacement are some of the driving factors of child marriage across geographic and cultural contexts, and rates increase in times of conflict and humanitarian crisis. In South Sudan, a country that has experienced civil war and violent conflict for over a decade, World Vision found that most women (85 percent) were married during their adolescent years.⁷

Of the 25 countries with the highest rates of child marriage, almost all are affected by conflict, protracted crisis, or natural disasters. When standard systems of child protection break down (e.g., when schools are bombed, rule of law is disrupted, or families are separated or displaced), the rates of child marriage increase. Parents may see marriage as a means to protect their daughters from the high rates of physical and sexual violence that take place in times of conflict or crisis. For example, before the start of the Syrian conflict, child marriage was not a common cultural or traditional practice. In 2017, a survey of Syrian refugees living in Lebanon showed that roughly 24 percent of girls were married before the age of 18. Estimates vary, but some show these child marriage rates to be four times higher among Syrian refugees today than they were before the war.⁸

Additionally, protracted crisis and conflict often leave girls with limited opportunities for education and parents with few livelihood options. In Bangladesh, displaced Rohingyas living in Cox's Bazaar do not have legal refugee status, meaning parents are not allowed to work, families are unable to move outside the camps, and formal education is

not permitted for the 540,000 children and youth living in the camps. Ninety-seven percent of adolescents and youth ages 15 to 24 do not have access to any kind of education (formal or informal), leaving girls highly vulnerable to child marriage.⁹

Another driving factor of child marriage is poverty. Girls from poor families are three times more likely to marry before the age of 18 than girls from wealthier families.¹⁰ Parents who are struggling to provide for themselves and their children may see the immediate value of their daughter's marriage into another family as a way to alleviate their financial burden. In some cultures, a bride price could be a means to provide for other children.

When parents and caregivers are faced with situations of extreme poverty or financial crisis, child marriage may seem like the best option for their daughters, but in the long-term, research shows that child marriage perpetuates cycles of poverty and violence. As a result of harmful gender norms and unequal power dynamics between young brides and their older husbands, child brides experience high rates of intimate partner violence (IPV) and have a difficult time advocating for better treatment. A comparative study of 34 countries with high levels of child marriage showed that IPV was substantially higher among women who married as children compared with those who married as adults.¹¹ Globally, girls who marry before the age of 15 are almost 50 percent more likely to have experienced physical or sexual violence from a partner than girls who married after the age of 18. Girls who married before the age of 18 are also more likely to believe that it is acceptable for a man to beat his wife.¹²

Child marriage is a symptom of a greater global problem: gender inequality. Because women and girls do not experience equal rights or have equal access to opportunities, their potential as social and economic change-agents remains untapped.¹³ Gender inequality is a major barrier to human development and progress toward more democratic societies. This has generational consequences for girls, who face discrimination that begins before they are born as a result of gender-biased sex selection (a preference for sons), and continues throughout their lifetime.¹⁴ Globally, women have less political representation, less access to education, and greater safety risks. They earn lower wages, do more unpaid work caring for children or elderly relatives, and have limited access to financial opportunities.¹⁵

ii While the practice of child marriage disproportionately affects girls, according to UNICEF, an estimated 115 million men around the world today were also married as children.

iii Contexts in which the government is unable or unwilling to provide adequate protection for all citizens.



A manifestation of global gender inequality, child marriage has serious consequences for young girls. The period of adolescence (ages 10-19)¹⁶ is filled with significant changes in physical and emotional maturity, sexuality, and cognitive development.¹⁷ Taking girls out of their school and home environments to marry older men is socially isolating and harmful to their overall growth. Marriage often requires the bride to move away from school, friends, and family to live in a new community or village with her husband. As a wife, she may be expected to carry the load of housework, including cooking, cleaning, fetching water, and raising children, leaving little time for social connection, studies, or leisure. The separation from family and friends can be traumatic and impede healthy cognitive development.

In addition to these challenges, child brides often lack the decision-making power to negotiate safer sex practices, making girls vulnerable to sexually transmitted infections or early pregnancy. In fact, child marriage commonly results in motherhood before girls are physically or emotionally ready. More than 90 percent of births to adolescent mothers (ages 15-19) occur within marriage.¹⁸ Sadly, pregnancy is the number one cause of death for adolescent girls.¹⁹ In many contexts, social and cultural norms pressure young brides to “prove their fertility” soon after they marry to avoid shame and stigma from family members or communities, but adolescent pregnancies are dangerous for both young mothers and their babies. Girls (10-19 years) face higher

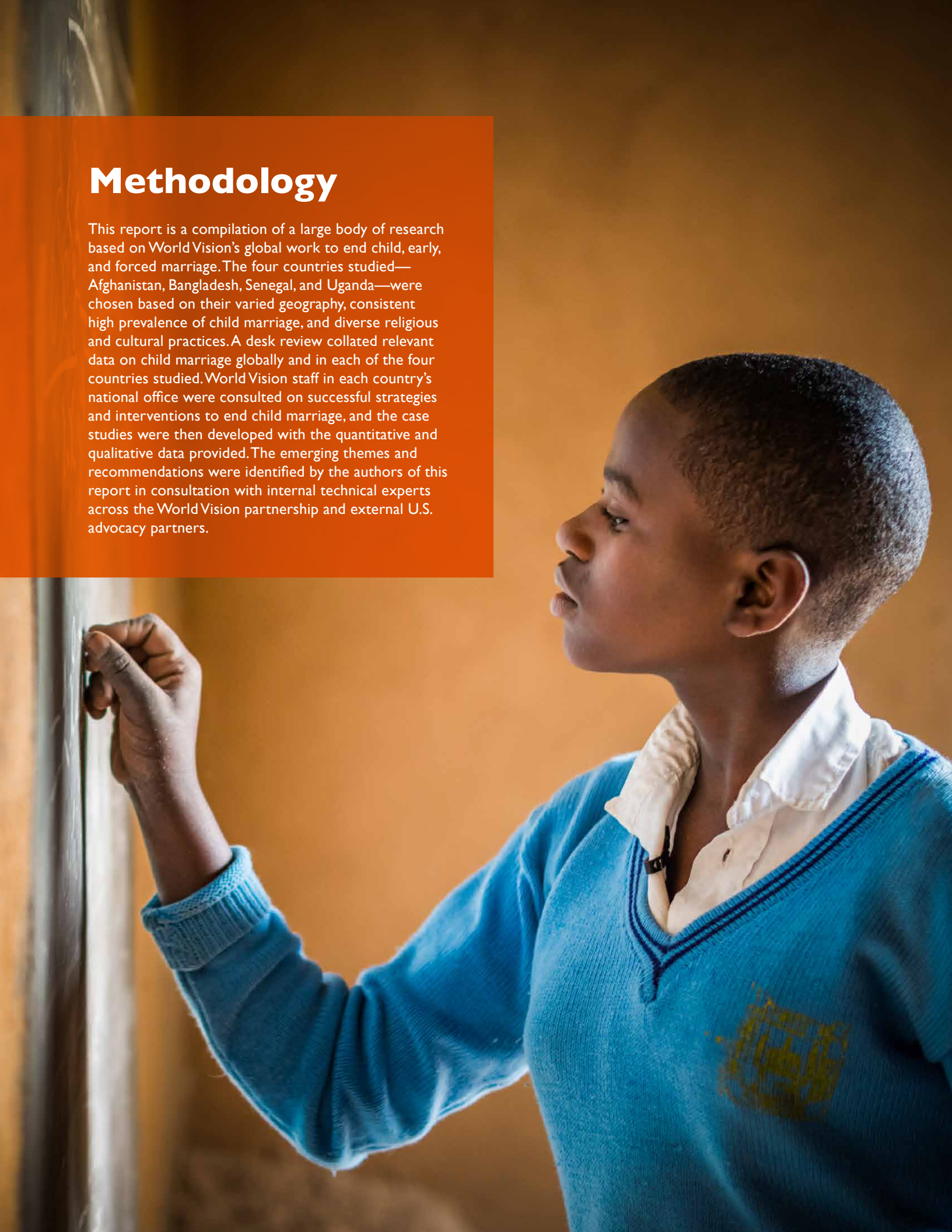
risks of eclampsia, puerperal endometritis, and systemic infections than women (20-24 years). For adolescent girls, there are greater risks of preterm delivery, low birth weight, and infant mortality.²⁰

For all of these reasons, the practice of child marriage is a serious violation of child protection and human rights. Child marriage is specifically targeted in the SDGs (SDG 5.3), but the eradication of this practice has implications for the achievement of many other global goals as well. Ending child marriage would contribute to the alleviation of poverty (SDG 1), allow more girls to access quality education (SDG 4), prevent and protect children from violence (SDG 16), and contribute to child and adolescent health and well-being (SDG 3).

Increasingly, donor countries are beginning to recognize the need to empower women and girls for sustainable development, stronger economies, more peaceful nations, and more equitable systems. In the current U.S. National Security Strategy, the U.S. government has recognized that “societies that empower women to participate fully in civic and economic life are more prosperous and peaceful,” and has committed to “support efforts to advance women’s equality, protect the rights of women and girls, and promote women and youth empowerment programs.”²¹ On a country’s journey to self-reliance—an articulated goal under USAID’s current strategy—ending child marriage is key.

Methodology

This report is a compilation of a large body of research based on WorldVision's global work to end child, early, and forced marriage. The four countries studied—Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Senegal, and Uganda—were chosen based on their varied geography, consistent high prevalence of child marriage, and diverse religious and cultural practices. A desk review collated relevant data on child marriage globally and in each of the four countries studied. WorldVision staff in each country's national office were consulted on successful strategies and interventions to end child marriage, and the case studies were then developed with the quantitative and qualitative data provided. The emerging themes and recommendations were identified by the authors of this report in consultation with internal technical experts across the WorldVision partnership and external U.S. advocacy partners.



Afghanistan: Ending child marriage in fragile contexts

Fragile states are some of the most dangerous places in the world to be a child. In fragile states, “the social contract between state and society is broken because people don’t see their government as accountable or responsive to their needs or treating citizens fairly.”²² Fragile states lack resilient systems, which means they cannot easily bounce back from disasters or crises. Similarly, fragile contexts are areas within or outside fragile states where weak government systems make them highly vulnerable to conflict and protracted crisis due to a combination of political, environmental, security, economic, and social pressures.

Fragile contexts can cover one state, many states, or only a few neighborhoods, and can change rapidly. In these contexts, children, especially girls, can face extreme levels of abuse, exploitation, violence, and neglect. The systems that would normally provide protection to children are fractured in fragile contexts. Fragility can lead to conflict and violence, which in turn contributes to complex protracted crises.²³ These cycles of violence, corruption, and poverty are challenging to break.

Ravaged by decades of war and natural disasters, Afghanistan is ranked among the top ten most fragile states in the world.²⁴ According to government figures, only 26 percent of Afghanistan’s population is literate, with the rate among

women around 12 percent.²⁵ Afghanistan ranks 168 out of 189 countries on the Gender Inequality Index, reflecting an especially low quality of life for women and girls.²⁶ According to a 2010 mortality survey by the Afghanistan Ministry of Public Health, “an estimated 2,000 Afghan women and girls attempt suicide by setting themselves on fire each year, which is linked to domestic violence and early or forced marriages.”²⁷

While Afghan law prohibits marriage before the age of 16, girls can be legally married at 15 with parental consent.²⁸ A combination of poverty, social and cultural norms, ongoing conflict, and weak enforcement of child marriage laws may push girls into marriage even earlier. Between 60 and 80 percent of marriages in Afghanistan are forced or underage,²⁹ and more than a third of Afghan girls are married before the age of 18.³⁰ Once married, they are at high risk of experiencing IPV or becoming pregnant as children.

Afghanistan has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world: 400 per 100,000 live births, which is a consequence of child marriage and early pregnancy.³¹ By way of comparison, this rate is 23 times higher than in the United States.³² Of the 468 Afghan women who participated



in a reproductive health knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAP) survey, two-thirds said they delivered their first child between 13 and 19, and most (93 percent) of the women needed authorization from their husband or a male relative before seeking professional healthcare.³³

WorldVision began working in Afghanistan in 2001, providing emergency relief to those who had been directly affected by a devastating drought. Since 2011, WorldVision has focused its community development work in the Herat, Ghor, and Badghis provinces in the western region of the country.

To meet the needs of Afghan women and girls, WorldVision works with men and boys, faith and community leaders, and other stakeholders in a girl's life to shift harmful norms and attitudes about gender; ultimately giving girls greater agency and decision-making capabilities. Access to quality education is also at the center of WorldVision's efforts to empower women and girls.

WorldVision's work in Afghanistan aims to ensure that girls and boys are educated, healthy, and protected, and that parents are economically empowered with the tools they need to care for them.

Faith in Social Change Project

In fragile contexts, faith leaders are well-suited as agents of change because they remain trusted and respected despite the breakdown of government systems and weak rule of law. Faith leaders are key to bringing about transformational change for women and girls because of their ability to raise awareness, advocate for the strengthening of law enforcement, and even shift social norms in their communities. Although formal institutions and governance may be unreliable in fragile contexts, local leadership and informal systems of governance—namely, the role and function of religious leaders and faith communities—remain consistent and can be supported and influenced to protect children and end harmful practices like child marriage.

WorldVision's Faith in Social Change (FiSC) project in Afghanistan is a five-year program that began in 2014 and will reach 2,668 people across multiple communities within the Herat, Ghor, Badghis, and Bamyan provinces of Afghanistan. The FiSC project is a family-strengthening initiative that trains faith leaders on child well-being and protection with a focus on increasing unity to combat household violence and end harmful practices such as child marriage. With key community leaders as messengers, the FiSC project prioritizes rebuilding broken or damaged relationships that affect family responses to protecting their children. Faith leaders are the focus for such training

because they are able to effectively transfer sensitive messages about the protection and well-being of children in regular gatherings. Faith leaders are also able to reach male audiences who are often the decision-makers on child marriage.

Khatema's Story

Khatema (age 9) was playing with her friends in the village when her younger brother told her about her father's decision to marry her to an older man.

At first, Khatema thought he was joking. "When I got home, my father wasn't there. My mother's eyes were red. My siblings were silent and just looked at me.... I asked my mother if they wanted to marry me off. She hugged me and started crying."

"I wanted to scream and cry, but I [couldn't]. I went to the stable. It was dark there and I started to cry."

Poor families in Afghanistan face a broad range of challenges. Ghafoor, Khatema's father, was finding it increasingly difficult to provide for his six children. With the money he could gain from Khatema's dowry, he could settle all of his loans and provide for the rest of his family.

Khatema had always dreamed of being a teacher, and if she was married like her older sister, she might never be able to realize her dream.

"I told my father not to marry me off. I told him that I wanted to be a teacher in the village school. [He] was silent and left the house."

Khatema's mother, Fatima, never wanted her daughters to have to live through what she did. She confided in a neighbor and a local leader who had attended WorldVision's training and could support her in approaching her husband.

Convincing her husband wasn't easy. It took one week of discussions with the neighbor and the village Imam before Ghafoor finally changed his mind. He would look for work elsewhere to pay off his debts.

Today, Khatema is studying and working hard. She says, "I am studying even harder than before to reach my dream of becoming a teacher. I am so happy. I feel relieved ... like something heavy has been lifted from my shoulders."



The FiSC project aims for holistic change in families and local leaders over time and defines success as changed attitudes and behaviors towards gender equity within the family and through sustainability in the ongoing actions of faith leaders. It uses a two-pronged approach to achieve these goals.

First, to transform harmful gender norms at the household level, FiSC uses a model called Celebrating Families (CF). Originally designed for Christian congregations, CF has proven successful when contextualized for Islamic faith communities. In Afghanistan, 99.7 percent of the population is Muslim, and religion plays a central role in social and political life.³⁴ In close consultation with Islamic religious scholars, a version of CF with principles from the Qur'an was launched in 2014. The objectives, format, and key content of the curriculum remain the same. The model works through a cascading system of information sharing: faith leaders identify barriers and issues affecting children's protection and nurture, then facilitate group parenting sessions that build knowledge and skills for positive family interactions.

The CF approach to behavior change communication has been effective for addressing child marriage and other forms of gender-based violence. For example, during the Friday prayers, Imams raise awareness on gender equity, human rights, violence against women, protection within families and community, and the rights of girls to education. So far, **85 percent** of trained Imams have spoken publicly on behalf of women's political and social empowerment and rights.

Imams are also sharing these topics at small meetings in communities, schools, and institutions (including with military and police). Participants have reported a reduction in the use of violent discipline within their homes and greater willingness to act on issues of child protection.

The second component of the FiSC project is change within communities. The Community Change model targets the transformation of harmful social norms and practices, including child marriage. It assumes that, given the right leadership, community groups will be eager to resolve endemic social challenges affecting cohesion and progress. Community Change arranges for dialogue about complex issues to take place over a full year (at least 20 sessions are held). At times, the conversation is challenging for participants, but the safe space provided through trusted, skilled facilitation helps them work through social issues and jointly generate solutions. Community Change creates space to discuss and address gender discrimination and intergenerational patterns of violence.

As part of Community Change, World Vision also trains Imams, as respected leaders in the community, to lead productive dialogue around issues such as violence against women and child marriage, linking these teachings back to core teachings of the Qur'an. As a result, Imams facilitate interchange between male and female shuras (elder groups) regarding social issues that affect women and girls and intervene in their communities on the issues of



Celebrating Families

Implemented in almost thirty countries around the world, World Vision's Celebrating Families (CF) model seeks to strengthen positive, loving relationships in families, remove harmful attitudes and practices, and encourage innate qualities of family culture in raising children. Guided by spiritual teaching and facilitated by faith leaders, the CF model encourages all members of the family to redefine their roles according to core values and beliefs. The goal of CF is that the family becomes a safe and supportive haven for children, where their physical, social, and spiritual needs are met. The CF modules highlight gender discrimination, including child marriage, intergenerational patterns of violence, and violent punishment within households, and explain why these patterns conflict with the teachings of religious texts.



Community Change

Implemented in 41 countries in 2018, Community Change is a process of sustained, facilitated dialogue allowing communities to identify for themselves beliefs and cultural practices that support or challenge children's well-being. Community members then agree on ways forward to protect children from harmful practices.

domestic violence and child marriage. Since October 2017, Community Change has supported **636 faith leaders and 350 other community leaders, school teachers, female shura, and Child Protection Action Network (CPAN)** members to identify beliefs and cultural practices that challenge children's well-being and facilitate sustained dialogue within their communities about solutions. So far, seven communities have launched campaigns about child marriage. These campaigns have been so effective that in one community a local Imam built a facility next to the mosque so that women and girls, who were previously excluded from participating in these meetings, can listen to the Friday prayer services and discussions.

Promising practices

Engaging and empowering local actors to identify challenges and take action in their own communities is a powerful mechanism for addressing child marriage and other forms of violence against children. Community Change is especially important in fragile contexts, where the social contract between governments and citizens is broken. An engaged community can also contribute to a decrease in child neglect, improved nutrition, and greater child participation in household and community decisions.

In fragile contexts like Afghanistan, World Vision's work with faith and community leaders has seen tremendous success. Faith leaders are well suited to address child marriage and violence against children because they remain trusted and respected despite weak rule of law and broken government systems. The role of faith leaders involves regularly bringing together groups to discuss community business, which can be an effective forum for learning and dialogue around the well-being of children. For the same reason, local councils, or shura, are also important partners for facilitating such dialogue. These local leaders understand and care deeply for the communities they serve and are key partners in World Vision's work to end the practice of child marriage.

Noba Jatra's life skills education—which includes leadership training and practical experience identifying and addressing manifestations of gender inequality—has led students to set some remarkable goals for themselves. One adolescent shared with World Vision staff that she wants to become a lawyer who specializes in stopping child marriage.³⁵ Another shared her desire to become a journalist that tells true stories about the dangers of child marriage and gender-based violence. Several girls and boys want to be doctors, engineers, and police officers.

Bangladesh: A “new beginning” for adolescent girls and young women

Child marriage is a major societal challenge in Bangladesh. A host of compounding factors—including poverty, limited educational opportunities, stigma around menstrual hygiene, and gender inequality—lead to high rates of child marriage and, consequently, high rates of intimate partner violence (IPV) and early pregnancy. Despite Bangladeshi law that girls may not marry until the age of 18, Bangladesh still holds the world's fourth highest child marriage rate: a testament to both weak enforcement of the law and strong cultural acceptance of child marriage. In Bangladesh, nearly six in ten girls are married before the age of 18.³⁶

Child marriage perpetuates the cycle of poverty that has plagued Bangladesh for many years and robs girls of the chance to grow, learn, and fully realize their potential. Poverty drives many children to leave school for work, often in unsafe or exploitative sectors, and pushes many parents to marry off their children at young ages. Often, the families of younger brides pay a lower dowry, eliminating some of the financial burden and giving the family “one less mouth to feed.” However, research shows that delaying marriage and keeping girls in school is important for girls' healthy development and future economic opportunities. When girls get married before reaching puberty, they have less knowledge about their own health and lower bargaining power in the household. They also give birth to more

children. Women who get married later have more decision-making power, higher education levels, and better health. Their children are more likely to complete their required vaccinations, have a higher weight-for-height ratio, enroll in school, attain better grades, and get married later in life.³⁷

Ending the practice and the cultural acceptance of child marriage in Bangladesh is important for the well-being of girls and for furthering the development of the country in terms of education, economic growth, and self-reliance.

Following the country's independence in 1972, the government of Bangladesh invited WorldVision to begin relief and rehabilitation programs within their borders. WorldVision works to reach the most vulnerable populations in both urban and rural communities. Today, WorldVision is reaching roughly five million children and three million adults with health and nutrition, education, livelihood, child protection, and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) projects in 51 area programs in Bangladesh (AP)^{iv}. In these APs, WorldVision works to provide educational and economic opportunities for families, raise awareness about the rights of children, and mobilize communities to end harmful practices like child marriage.

iv Distinct geographical areas where WorldVision partners with local stakeholders to improve the well-being of children through multiple sector projects aimed at the root causes of issues that negatively impact children, like child marriage.



Nobo Jatra project

To effectively address the multiple driving factors of child marriage in Bangladesh, the Nobo Jatra project takes a multi-sectoral response that improves access to quality education and life skills for girls, engages men and boys, helps families build resilience, and raises awareness about the health consequences of child marriage. The Nobo Jatra (“New Beginning”) project is a five-year (2015-2020) USAID-funded project that seeks to reach over 200,000 households with improved gender-equitable food security, nutrition, and resilience in southwest Bangladesh. Implemented by World Vision and Winrock International in partnership with the

World Food Program and the Government of Bangladesh, Nobo Jatra seeks to address the driving factors of child marriage by improving food security, life skills education for adolescent girls and boys, local-level advocacy, and economic opportunities for parents.

The project's primary focus is to increase gender-equitable food security and household incomes, thereby ensuring that both boys and girls can thrive. As part of the Nobo Jatra project, World Vision provides life skills-based education (LSBE) training that helps adolescent girls understand their rights, build confidence, and practice self-expression. It also helps parents understand the consequences of child marriage. During the LSBE training sessions, 20 students—10 boys and 10 girls—are taught leadership and communication skills and educated on their right not to be married before the age of 18. The class facilitators also teach emotional expression and control, and work to correct gender biases between boys and girls. In partnership with child protection committees, these young leaders participate in community action to stop child marriages they hear are being planned.

Nobo Jatra's life skills education—which includes leadership training and practical experience identifying and addressing manifestations of gender inequality—has led students to set some remarkable goals for themselves. One adolescent shared with World Vision staff that she wants to become a lawyer who specializes in stopping child marriage. Another shared her desire to become a journalist that tells true stories about the dangers of child marriage and gender-based violence. Several girls and boys want to be doctors, engineers, and police officers.

Currently Nobo Jatra's life skills education course takes place in 142 schools and reaches 16,600 adolescents—all with their own incredible stories of transformation and empowerment. To ensure children and adolescents benefit from this program long after Nobo Jatra has ended, World Vision is working with the Department of Education in Bangladesh to incorporate the sessions into the standard school curriculum.

Nobo Jatra also facilitates small-group discussions where couples discuss the practicalities of marriage and family life, including shared responsibilities in parenting and financial management. These trainings encourage men to ask tough questions about masculinity and human dignity. To date, 10,076 couples have graduated from the Male Engagement module. Data has shown the percent of participants who think men and women should share household responsibilities has increased **45 percent** from the baseline, and the number of men who think women should be consulted about household budgeting and purchases has increased by **36 percent**.³⁸ As part of Male Engagement, fathers are encouraged to support their daughters' education

The Das Family

For the Das family, putting food on the table for their children was a struggle. Arobindo, the father, made very little money as a van driver, and when his wife, Shabitri, got appendicitis and his daughter, Modhumala, was diagnosed with a bone tumor in her leg, the family became dependent on the generosity of friends and neighbors.

“The money my husband earned wasn't enough. There was not a single day that we didn't quarrel with each other. We weren't able to buy enough food. I was not able to feed my children. I thought throughout my life I would struggle with poverty and we would be unhappy forever,” said Shabitiri.

However, as part of the Nobo Jatra entrepreneurial training program, Shabitiri received startup money to start a bamboo weaving business and a small grocery store. This allowed her family to graduate out of the ultra-poor categorization. Then she was able to help others in her community do the same.

Along with the economic support and training she received, Shabitiri was told about the dangers of child marriage and how to protect her daughters. Shabitiri remembered her own marriage to her husband at just 11 years old: “Child marriage was common, but from Nobo Jatra, I know the demerits. Girls must be married at 18. The difficulties I faced in my life came from child marriage.”

She and Arobindo have agreed to keep their children—Modhumala (15), Ratna (12), and Nayan (6)—in school: “My children are doing good in their [exam] results. I am believing they may have a good future.”

and wait until their daughters are at least 18 years of age to consider a consensual marriage with a man who will respect and value her.

Combining approaches to encourage girls to stay in school and fathers to prioritize the education of their daughters, Nobo Jatra works to provide economic opportunities for parents, further disincentivizing them from marrying their daughters as children. In some parts of southwest Bangladesh, roughly a quarter of households live below the poverty line (\$1.90 a day).³⁹ At this level of poverty, day-to-day necessities like food and shelter are difficult to afford. Natural disasters or medical emergencies can be devastating for families. To alleviate some of these financial pressures, the Nobo Jatra project provides entrepreneurial training for women to increase their incomes, making it possible for them to provide nutritious food for their families.

To date, the Nobo Jatra project has trained 21,000 women living in ultra-poverty in basic entrepreneurial literacy skills, and over 14,000 women have received start-up capital of \$188 to help them launch small businesses. On average, women who participate in this training have **almost doubled their income** (to 42 percent higher than baseline incomes). Research shows women usually invest a higher portion of their earnings in their families than men do, and that greater bargaining power for women results in greater investment in children's education, health, and nutrition.⁴⁰ Powerful social change is spurred as some women acknowledge the pain they endured as child brides and see the link between their own experience of child marriage and the cycle of poverty that they, their husbands, and their children now face.

Since Nobo Jatra began in 2015, forty-six child protection committees have rallied together to enforce child marriage laws and policies, leading to a decrease in child marriages. WorldVision and community partners on the ground have directly intervened to stop **192 child marriages** in Bangladesh, and have indirectly aided in the prevention of many more.

In addition to enacting measures that prevent child marriage, Nobo Jatra works to address the unique needs of already-married adolescent girls through local-level advocacy. The Bangladesh Constitution emphasizes a commitment to protect the fundamental human rights of freedom, equality, and justice, as well as political, economic, and social rights for all citizens.⁴¹ However, weak accountability, inefficient administration systems, and corruption remain major challenges for the country and culminate in poor governance.

To encourage the government to uphold its commitment to human rights, WorldVision uses an evidence-based model for



social accountability called Citizen Voice and Action (CVA). CVA employs targeted civic engagement and participatory community service “scorecards” to compare the government standards with the reality of public services. Then CVA empowers citizens to communicate this disparity to local leaders. The Nobo Jatra project has mobilized over 40,000 community members to advocate for improved access and quality of public services.

For example, in the Chunkuri village in Bangladesh, citizens were equipped with tools and training to advocate for improved reproductive and maternal health resources and counseling at their local community clinic. As a result, Chunkuri

mothers now receive pre- and postnatal care in a clean, modernized government facility, rather than having to travel to a private clinic many miles away in a neighboring town. The clinic also provides culturally appropriate family planning services that educate mothers and fathers on the healthy timing and spacing of pregnancies (HTSP). It's estimated that HTSP counseling could prevent as many as one-third of maternal deaths by enabling women to delay their first pregnancy to at least age 18, space their pregnancies by two to five years, avoid unplanned pregnancy, and limit childbearing to their healthiest years.⁴² Overall, Nobo Jatra's capacity building for social accountability and action has been successful and resulted in improved service delivery.

The project also supported the national "Bride Not Before 18" campaign (2013-2017), initiated by the National Human Rights Commission and World Vision Bangladesh. The purpose of this campaign was to raise awareness, facilitate local-level advocacy, and strengthen child forums and community-based organizations to influence local leaders (e.g., chairmen, council members, local administration, teachers, and local police/law enforcement agencies) and reduce the prevalence of child marriage in targeted areas. A study by World Vision Bangladesh showed that harmful beliefs about child marriage decreased by **15.2 percent** in the intervention areas.⁴³

Promising practices

Nobo Jatra's cross-cutting approach addresses the divergent and driving factors undergirding the cultural acceptance of child marriage. Its holistic approach paves the way for sustainable cultural change, supporting the empowerment of young women and girls and the betterment of their families and communities. Nobo Jatra's focus on providing life skills education and entrepreneurial opportunities addresses the critical underlying drivers of child marriage, including poverty and food insecurity. At the national level, the public messaging campaign is also supporting shifts to change social and cultural beliefs about child marriage. Empowering young women and girls with the skills and opportunity to advocate for themselves is an essential part of this campaign. In addition, the meaningful engagement of men and boys can help to create lasting and sustainable change to eradicate this practice. This engagement creates a lasting change in norms over time, decreasing harmful attitudes and behaviors towards child marriage.



Citizen Voice and Action

World Vision's Citizen Voice and Action (CVA) social accountability tool helps communities understand their legal rights and mobilizes advocacy groups that aim to hold the government accountable. CVA has led to improved services, amplified community voice, and advocacy in more than 48 countries. This methodology provides a tested approach for shaping national advocacy through citizen education, building their capacity to engage in local and national policy issues.



Senegal: The role of faith and community leaders in ending child marriage

Some of the highest rates of child marriage in the world are found in West Africa, in countries such as Senegal. Of Senegal's eight million children, 31 percent are married before the age of 18.⁴⁴ Violence against children is also high. Around 29 percent of adolescent girls (ages 15-19) experience physical or sexual violence.⁴⁵ According to UNICEF, it will take over 100 years to end child marriage in West and Central Africa, with severe consequences for millions of child brides. If increased interventions are not prioritized, this could have a "crippling impact on the region's prosperity."⁴⁶ Female genital mutilation and cutting (FGM/C) is also still common, despite the ban on the practice in 1999.

Senegal has gained international recognition for its efforts to increase the political participation of women through the adoption of the Gender Parity Law (2010). Today, 43 percent of parliamentarians are female. Senegal has also achieved gender equality in access to primary education with an enrollment rate for girls of 98 percent. However, significant disparities exist when girls enter secondary school. Many traditional norms related to the value, role, and treatment of women and girls, including the practice of child marriage, keep girls from finishing school.

Senegal has gained international recognition for its efforts to increase the political participation of women through the adoption of the Gender Parity Law (2010). Today, 43 percent of parliamentarians are female.⁴⁷ Senegal has also achieved gender equality in access to primary education with an enrollment rate for girls of 98 percent.⁴⁸ However, significant disparities exist when girls enter secondary school. Many traditional norms related to the value, role, and treatment of women and girls, including the practice of child marriage, keep girls from finishing school.

Since 1989, World Vision Senegal has partnered with local communities to address the needs of the most vulnerable populations through long-term development programs. World Vision is implementing 24 programs in the Fatick, Diourbel, Kaffrine, Tambacounda, Kédougou, and Kolda regions that will benefit more than eight million children by



2021. In 2017, World Vision's assessment in Senegal showed that child marriage and early pregnancy are the two most urgent issues for community actors. World Vision Senegal has prioritized ending child marriage through national advocacy, community-based interventions, and partnerships with faith leaders and faith communities to address the root causes of this practice.

In highly religious contexts like Senegal, research shows that faith leaders are trusted and can be important allies for social norm change. A study from Gallup showed that across Africa, religion is the greatest way people choose to identify themselves, even over national identity. Religious leaders are the most trusted group in Africa with recorded rates 41 percent higher than the global average.⁴⁹ One of World Vision's global strategic priorities is to strengthen the role of faith in development towards improved well-being for children in families and communities. Building on World Vision's global expertise in building relationships and trust amongst diverse faith groups and creating partnerships that support our common objectives for child well-being, World Vision Senegal has developed a five-year plan to integrate faith and development into Senegal's broader national development strategy.

Channels of Hope for Child Protection (CoH CP)

In 2008, World Vision began engaging Muslim and Christian faith leaders in Senegal on HIV/AIDS prevention and response. When this partnership proved successful, the model ("Channels of Hope") was expanded to engage faith leaders on child protections issues in Senegal. With support from trained facilitators, faith leaders worked together to first identify doctrinal similarities in their respective faith traditions with regard to the care and protection of children. Following this process, leaders participated in the Channels of Hope for Child Protection (CoH CP) training, which equipped them with the theological and scientific evidence required to mobilize their faith communities to address violence against children. Since 2015, World Vision has been using the CoH CP methodology to address issues like child marriage and FGM/C across Senegal.

While many religious texts (including the Bible and the Q'uran) teach that God cares about the well-being of children and condemns practices of violence towards children, religious teachings are sometimes intermixed with longstanding cultural practices. Theological misinterpretations of religious texts can fuel damaging attitudes and practices towards children. In Senegal, more than 95 percent of the population identifies as Muslim and hosts a large variety of

tribal and cultural groups. These groups uniquely influence the population's beliefs and attitudes about the roles of men, women, and children. Through interfaith partnerships across the country, World Vision has been able to leverage the strong influence that Muslim and Christian religious leaders have on the wider community, initially working with and through them to highlight doctrinal similarities concerning the care of children, and to equip faith leaders with the knowledge needed to teach on all aspects of child protection and well-being.

In 2016, in collaboration with the Institute for Global Health and Development of Queen Margaret's University in Edinburgh, World Vision initiated a global study on faith communities' contributions to ending violence against children in Senegal. In 2018, the mid-term report showed that the CoH CP workshop transformed the faith leaders' beliefs about child protection, which led them to take individual action and mobilize other community members to bring about positive change.⁵⁰ Participating faith leaders' attitudes on corporal punishment, early marriage, and birth registration had changed after the workshop. **72 percent** reported no longer using violence as a form of discipline within their own homes. After one year of participation in the CoH CP program, **26 percent** of faith leaders vowed to stop performing child marriages in Senegal. Additionally, the percentage of faith leaders who viewed child marriage as a protective alternative to early pregnancy was almost



Channels of Hope for Child Protection

Channels of Hope for Child Protection (CoH CP) is World Vision's global model for transforming and mobilizing faith communities to address harmful traditional practices toward children, to support and advocate for children's rights, to become better child protectors, and to ultimately strengthen the local child protection system. CoH CP combines guiding principles from religious texts, interactive activities, and scientific evidence and information on the negative effects of violence on children.



cut in half (**48 percent reduction**). One Senegalese Imam who participated in the training told World Vision staff: “The training session allowed me to understand that girls must be kept in school and avoid early marriage. It is also necessary to accept to come closer to children to establish a sincere dialogue so that they should not be afraid of you.”

The study provided evidence that faith leaders and their spouses who participated in CoH workshops also changed their religious views on child rights. The spouse of one Imam shared: “We learned from this training workshop how to take care of our children, to monitor their studies, to register them at birth for a birth certificate. We also learned not to beat children but to be attentive to their opinions. We have been told about our daughters’ early marriages that can bring complications. Finally, we have been told to avoid forced marriages since girls have rights.”

Not only have the attitudes and behaviors of faith leaders and their spouses changed on the issues of child marriage, birth registration, violent discipline, and child labor; but mosques and churches are now engaging more with parents and caregivers on child protection issues than they were before the training. **Ninety-three percent** of participants reported being engaged in community child protection activities within the last 12 months. While most of their child protection work focuses on sensitization of community members, activities also include making birth registration obligatory and intervening to stop the practice of child marriage.

World Vision also works with faith leaders in Senegal using the CVA model. In 2017, a group of faith leaders and 100 children visited the Presidential Palace to present the president with a memorandum expressing their concerns about the prevalence of child marriage across the country and advocate for a stronger national response. President Sall was so moved by their advocacy and the cause that he publicly endorsed World Vision’s campaign to end child marriages in the country and elevated the issue within the Ministry of Children and Women.⁵¹

Promising practices

Engaging faith leaders is critical for sustainable social norm change. Since a vast majority of the global population identifies as religious, there is a great need for interfaith engagement and dialogue to ensure all faith leaders are represented and mobilized around shared understandings of the importance of ending harmful practices like child marriage. The CoH CP model has the potential to change attitudes and behaviors toward child marriage and other forms of violence against children and could be scaled up to benefit more children in Senegal and around the world.

Uganda: Ending child marriage through gender transformative education

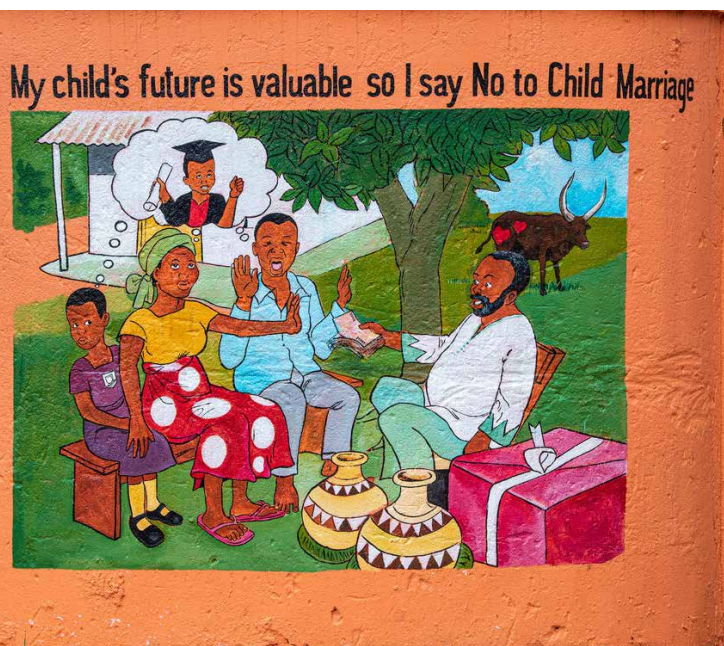
In many low-income countries, parents and caregivers cannot afford to send any of their children to school. If they have enough resources to send one child, they commonly choose to educate their boys, which is considered a more sound investment.⁵² In contrast, girls often bear a greater duty to contribute to domestic work and provide support in childrearing. A report from UNICEF showed that girls on average spend 40 percent more time on domestic work such as cooking, cleaning, or collecting water and firewood compared to boys their age.⁵³ The combination of extreme poverty and gender inequality is particularly disempowering for girls.

The unfair expectations placed on girls and the disparity in opportunities available to them only intensify as they get older. Significant progress has been made toward achieving gender parity in primary school, but a gap exists as girls enter secondary school, when the cost of continuing their education

begins to outweigh the perceptible benefits of traditional practices such as child marriage. In Uganda, **only one in four girls makes it past grade 10**.⁵⁴ When girls hit adolescence, the pressures to work, marry, and bear children increase exponentially. According to UNICEF, Uganda has the sixteenth highest prevalence rate of child marriage in the world, and the tenth highest absolute number of child brides globally. Forty percent of girls are married by age 18, and 10 percent are married by age 15.⁵⁵

Across the country, gender-based violence (GBV) presents a serious problem for the healthy development of children and adolescents. The recent Uganda Violence Against Children Survey (VACS) showed that young boys and girls are exposed to high amounts of violence and trauma in their early years.^v Of the Ugandan youth (18-24 years old) surveyed, one in six boys and **one in three girls** reported experiencing sexual violence during their childhoods, including 11 percent of girls who experienced pressured or forced sex.⁵⁶ Such high rates of violence toward girls and young women are a driving factor in the decisions of parents and caregivers to marry off their girls early. Many parents and caregivers believe that child marriage may provide both financial security and protection for their girls from physical or sexual violence outside of marriage. However, early marriage often results in girls dropping out of school and places them at a higher risk of HIV infection and sexual violence.⁵⁷

WorldVision Uganda began relief operations in central Uganda in 1986 following the war. Later development work began with the initiation of Community Development Projects (CDPs) in central, southern, western, and West Nile regions between 1987 and 1995. WorldVision Uganda currently operates in more than 50 districts, with 53 Area Programs (APs).



^v The VACS provide nationally representative data to inform policies and programming aiming to end violence against children in Uganda.

The SAGE DREAMS project

In October 2016, WorldVision was awarded a DREAMS^{vi} Innovation Challenge grant administered by the U.S. Department of State and the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) to implement the Strengthening School-Community Accountability for Girl's Education (SAGE) project. The baseline survey involving 38,750 adolescent girls (ages 13-19) across 10 districts in Uganda revealed that 70 percent of girls had experienced school-related sexual and gender-based violence within the previous six months. In partnership with JSI Research & Training Institute, the SAGE project was designed as a school-based HIV prevention program for adolescent girls, which used an Early Warning System (EWS) to track school attendance and a set of supporting social and behavioral interventions to change social norms around girls' education.

The project aimed to reduce violence and improve positive gender norms at home, in school, and in the community,

and to empower adolescent girls with the agency and social support necessary to stay in school, remain safe from violence, and avoid contracting HIV. The project used a two-pronged strategy with the EWS and Stay in School Committees (SISC) to transform social norms and practices; reduce risks of child marriage, pregnancy, GBV, and HIV infection; and to enable girls to stay in school.

The EWS intervention was an adolescent-led, adult-supported, evidence-based monitoring and accountability mechanism. It involved adolescents, their schools, families, and communities in monitoring students' attendance and taking practical actions to support at-risk students to remain in school. Three key functions of the EWS package were to predict dropout (using the school's register), to prevent dropout (by creating an environment where girls are safe and encouraged to learn), and to return vulnerable girls to school through home visits and mentoring.

The SISC was the primary accountability body, and most of their actions and decisions were adolescent-led. Each

vi DREAMS is an acronym for Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-free, Mentored, and Safe.

Veronica's Story

Veronica (18) is a student at Mityana Secondary School. When WorldVision began implementing the SAGE project, Veronica stood out as one of the brightest students in her grade level. In her first term of Senior Five, Veronica scored high on her exams, impressing her teachers and showing the promise of a very bright future.

In her second term, however, things changed. Veronica began dating an older man who owned a boutique store in the village and her grades started to slip.

One evening after Veronica came home from a day of working in the store, her mother began to ask where she had been. Veronica denied her mother's accusations of promiscuity, but her mother was infuriated and beat her. Veronica's mother took her phone, refused to continue paying for her education, and ultimately sent her away to live with her boyfriend, asserting that it was now his responsibility to marry her.

For the next several weeks, Veronica remained out of school. She and her mother had both lost hope in the opportunities that a quality education could provide for a smart girl like Veronica.

After noticing a trend in Veronica's poor grades and absences from school, a teacher informed the SISC. Members of the SISC traveled to Veronica's home to speak with her mother. As a result, Veronica's mother forgave her and began to pay her tuition again.

Veronica is now working hard to stay diligent in school. She told WorldVision staff, "The DREAMS project has mentored me and empowered me to stay in school. If they [the SISC] were not there, I would have been married right now."

As part of the project, the head teacher at Veronica's school meets with her individually once a week to mentor her. Veronica has also been tested for HIV and knows her status. Additionally, she has learned how to make reusable sanitary pads and has transferred this knowledge to her 12-year-old sister and friends in the community so they can make pads for themselves and for income.

Veronica hopes to attend University and study civil engineering. Veronica's story and her continued determination has inspired younger students in her school, who now see her as a role model.

school's SISC consisted of 12 to 15 people: a mother, a father, a faith leader, one teacher, one head teacher, one school administrator, one adolescent boy, and six adolescent girls who were elected as "peer educators" by their classmates to counsel, educate, and monitor the attendance and behavior of fellow students for signs of dropout. If a girl was flagged by a classmate, friend, or teacher, her case was referred to the SISC, which decided on next steps to ensure the girl was supported. The types of support girls received included mentorship by peer educators or teachers, tutoring, fundraising support for school fees, and donated school supplies or other items that the girls may lack (e.g., sanitary pads, money for meals, or textbooks). In many of the schools where SAGE was implemented, girls cited lack of school fees as the catalyst that forced them into exploitative work or early marriages. In some cases, if a girl had dropped out, the SISC would conduct a home visit to intervene in situations of GBV or child marriage. Home visits usually consisted of a meeting with the girl, a family member, and an elder or community leader. SISC members discussed the importance of girls' education, the consequences of child marriage, and solutions to financial hardship, and then advocated for the girl to return to school.

Of the 44,000 adolescent girls reached by the project, **99.7 percent were retained in school** (compared to the national retention rate of less than 70 percent for girls). Because of the SAGE project, girls were able to see a new world of opportunity through education, supported by their peers and teachers.

Promising practices

Education can have a tremendous impact on the course of a girl's life. Not only does it open doors for future economic opportunities, but education allows adolescent girls the chance to develop life skills and social connections in a critical time of cognitive development. Leaving school can be both a cause and a consequence of early marriage, but programs with the primary goal of keeping girls in school has proven to be an effective way to also address child marriage. Schools are an important source of information about rights, health services, and safety.

Educated women have more skills, self-confidence, and are likely to marry at a later age and have fewer children. Each year of secondary education reduces the likelihood of marrying before the age of 18 by five percentage points or more, making it a necessary component of all global efforts to end child marriage.

Another important factor in the success of the SAGE project was its intentional effort to include adolescents in program design, implementation, and evaluation. Adolescent girls were consulted at each stage and seen as thought leaders. SAGE sought to give peer educators an opportunity to grow through life-skills programming, including leadership, communication, sexual and reproductive health, HIV prevention and treatment, and menstrual hygiene management. In turn, adolescent girls led other aspects of the project, such as mentorship, designing health messages for their peers, and conducting trainings for fellow students. By giving the girls leadership opportunities as peer educators, they were able to build confidence in their capacity to speak on equal-footing with adults and to meaningfully contribute to community-led transformation.

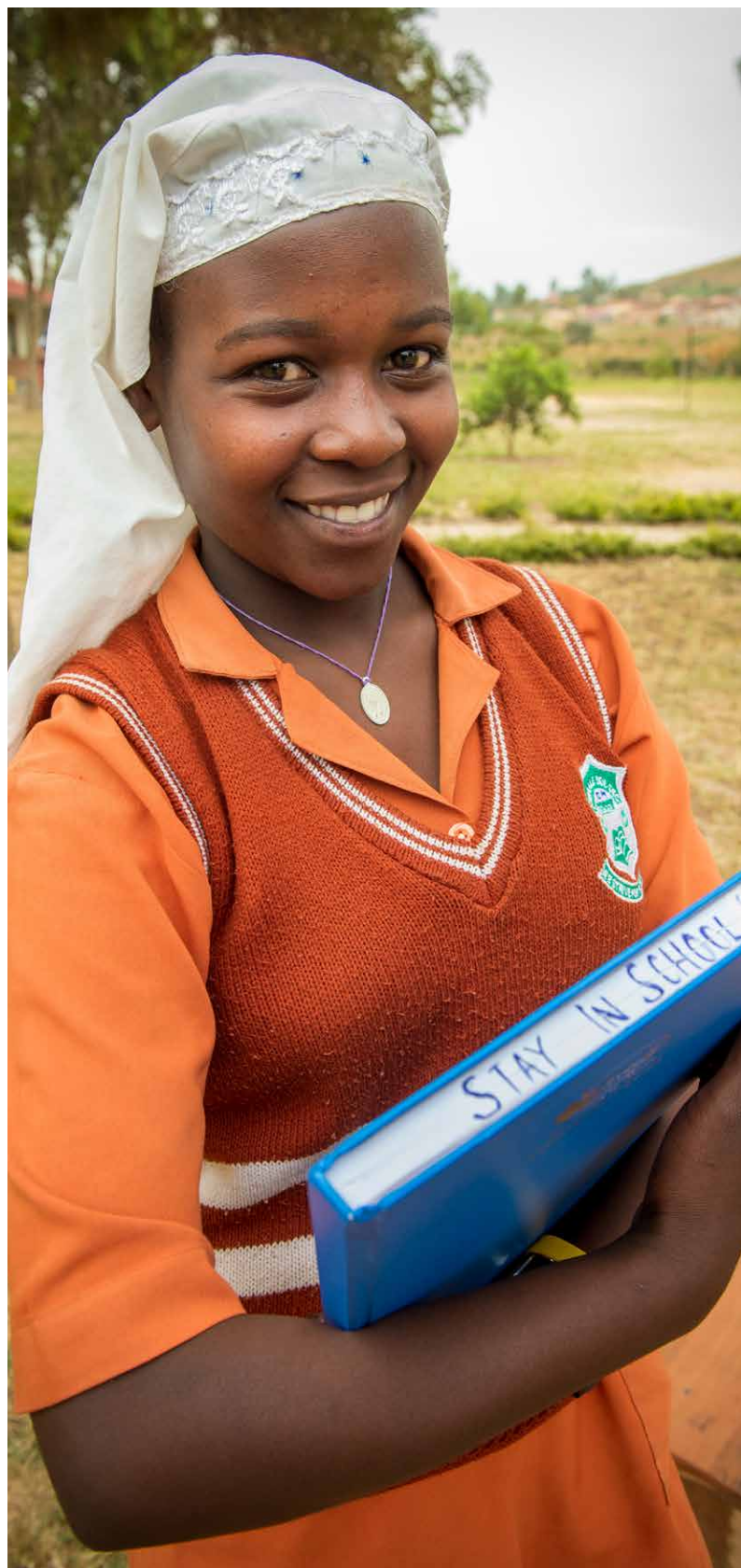


Conclusion

At World Vision, we believe that every child deserves the chance to experience life in all its fullness, to dream big dreams, and to realize their God-given potential. Child marriage is a serious violation of a girls' rights and deserves a robust global response. While programmatic interventions should be tailored to fit specific contexts, several cross-cutting themes emerged from this analysis of World Vision's global work to end child marriage. These six themes reflect many of the identified best practices named at the end of each case study, and offer guidance for successful approaches to ending child marriage across cultural and geographic contexts:

Empowering women and girls as key decision-makers and agents of change achieves long-lasting results. At every stage of program design, implementation, and evaluation, it is critical to elevate the voices of women and girls. In the Uganda DREAMS project, girls were empowered as peer educators to speak up for themselves and educate their peers. They were given specific leadership roles and opportunities to engage with adults and other members of the SISC, building their leadership skills and self-confidence. This structure proved sustainable beyond the life of the project. In the Bangladesh Nobo Jatra project, the Life Skills-Based Education (LSBE) training taught adolescent girls and boys about the harmful effects of child marriage, educated them on the right to marry when they choose, and encouraged them to speak out when they saw child marriage taking place in their villages. Many girls who received LSBE training advocated for themselves by telling their parents they had rights and did not want to be married early. In addition, empowering mothers with livelihood opportunities and life skills training helped them secure additional income for their households and increased their agency, which had positive implications for their children. Giving women and girls a voice in all aspects of project design and implementation and empowering them to advocate for themselves and their peers is essential for the success of child marriage programming.

Involving local community and faith leaders is critical for long-term cultural and social norm change. Religious leaders are respected messengers in their communities who are able to set and shift social norms, and religious services and prayer gatherings are important community hubs where faith leaders can disseminate critical information. Through longstanding partnerships built on trust within communities, World Vision has been able to engage religious leaders from different faith practices to leverage their cultural authority and transform harmful attitudes and practices that impact child well-being. In Senegal, where



31 percent of girls are married before the age of 18, almost half of all faith leaders who participated in WorldVision's CoH CP training changed their views on child marriage as a protective alternative to early pregnancy, and many took actions to stop the practice in their communities. Engagement with faith leaders also allows for peer-to-peer dialogue about beliefs and practices that can achieve results with broader reach.

Engaging men and boys provides community and household-level support structures for girls to say “no” to child marriage. Acknowledging and addressing the attitudes and opinions of men and boys, who hold significant social power in traditional cultures, is crucial for preventing child marriage, which is a practice deeply rooted in gender inequality. The education of fathers is especially important since they often decide whether to marry their

daughters at an early age. In Afghanistan, engaging the village Imam to speak with Khatema's father helped to keep her in school instead of being married at the age of nine as a means to settle the family's debt (full story on p. 11). In Bangladesh, parenting classes where fathers were taught about the infinite value of their daughters helped girls to access greater opportunities. It's important to work with men and boys, alongside women and girls, to end this practice.

Child marriage has many varied and complex driving factors which require multi-sectoral solutions. The INSPIRE package of interventions are evidence-based models for addressing some of the factors leading to child marriage and other forms of violence against children. INSPIRE is an acronym for seven multi-sectoral strategies for ending violence against children, including

INSPIRE Framework for Ending Child Marriage

Implementation and enforcement of laws: Create or strengthen existing laws that ban child marriage and build capacity for improved implementation.

Norms and values: Shift harmful social and cultural norms and values about child marriage by mobilizing communities to prevent the practice and intervene when they see it taking place.

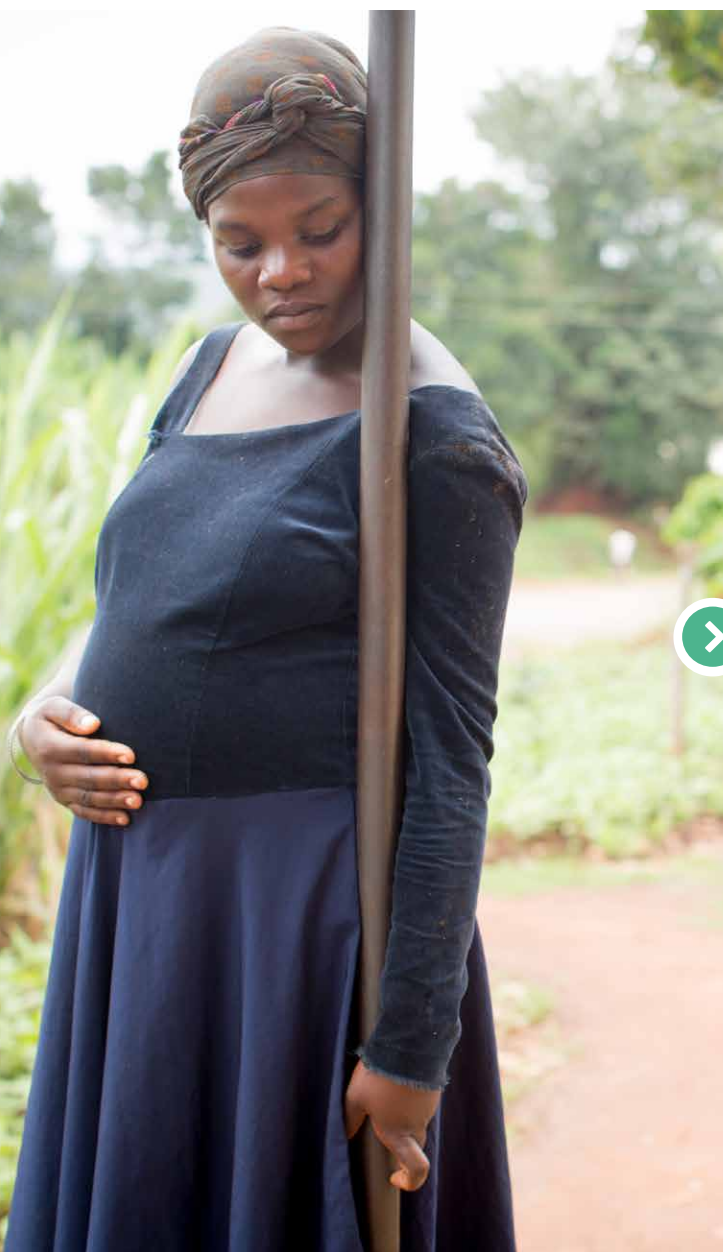
Safe environments: Provide safe environments for young women and girls to live free from violence.

Parent and caregiver support: Provide education and support for caregivers on the harmful ramifications of child marriage in community settings and through home visits.

Income and economic strengthening: Increase incomes and livelihood opportunities for parents and caregivers through cash transfers, microfinance, or group loans and savings combined with gender and child protection training.

Response and support services: Provide physical and mental health services (including counseling and therapy) to adolescent girls and young women who have been married or experienced violence.

Education and life skills: Establish a safe and enabling school environment where both boys and girls receive quality education and life skills training along with critical information about their safety and rights.



child marriage. In order to see an end to this practice, these strategies must be employed simultaneously. For example, the primary objective of the Bangladesh Nobo Jatra project was to create gender-equitable food security and shift harmful cultural norms that keep families from thriving. Social norms related to gender inequality cannot effectually change without empowering caregivers with resources and training to raise their household income. As such, the project employed income and economic strengthening approaches alongside interventions focused on behavior change. The project also used CVA and the “Bride Not Before 18” campaign to encourage the strengthening of laws and service delivery. Employing multiple INSPIRE strategies simultaneously is the most tactical way to address the complex driving factors of child marriage.

Education provides alternative pathways and increased opportunities for girls at risk of child marriage. The education of young women and girls is an essential part of ending child marriage, including breaking the cycle of poverty that drives it. In Uganda, holistic interventions—initiated in the school setting, but inclusive of girls’ needs at home and in their communities—resulted in high (99 percent) retention rates and allowed girls to delay marriage and have more decision-making power in their own lives. Across all four contexts, adolescent girls saw child marriage as an immediate threat to their education and it was clear that they desired to stay in school. When empowered with an understanding of their rights to education, girls can be powerful advocates for themselves and their peers. Educating girls also has important implications for families and communities. When a girl in the developing world receives seven years of education, she marries four years later and has fewer children.⁵⁸ Research shows that educated women have more skills, self-confidence, and earn higher wages.⁵⁹ Ending child marriage has enormous potential benefits for girls, their families, and the global economy. Interventions to end child marriage should be coupled with strengthening gender-transformative education programs and building the capacity of local schools.

Community-led social accountability mechanisms are vital to effectively end the practice of child marriage. Social accountability empowers all people to share their experiences and voice their concerns about the harmful impacts of child marriage. Providing avenues for advocacy is key to sustainable transformation and service delivery. In Senegal, local campaigns about ending child marriage were so effective that they won the approval of the country’s president. Local and national-level advocacy can help government leaders justify greater action, partnerships, and budget to address the needs of adolescent

girls and spur their own economic growth. In Bangladesh, CVA has helped hundreds of communities access government health clinics and other public services. CVA is effective in a variety of contexts. It can help state-society accountability and development coordination to end child marriage and support girls who are already married.

U.S. policy recommendations

Child marriage is an unjust form of violence against children: it puts young girls in danger and keeps them from reaching their full potential. The global economic impact resulting from physical, psychological, and sexual violence against children is estimated to be as high as \$7 trillion, yet the U.S. government spends less than 0.1 percent of its budget for official development assistance on projects that address violence against children, including child marriage.⁶⁰

There is a growing recognition among U.S. lawmakers that ending child marriage is necessary for the achievement of other foreign policy goals. In 2013, the U.S. Congress passed legislation that required the U.S. Secretary of State to establish and implement a multi-year, multi-sectoral strategy to prevent child marriage and promote the empowerment of girls at risk of child marriage in developing countries. To meet this requirement, in 2016 the U.S. State Department adopted the Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls, which included specific provisions on ending child marriage and addressing the needs of already-married girls globally. At the same time, the State Department began reporting on child marriage as a human rights abuse in annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices.

In addition to legislative actions, USAID has developed vision and guidance around the U.S. Government’s role in ending child marriage internationally. The USAID Vision for Action on Ending Child Marriage and Meeting the Needs of Married Children is an important effort by the U.S. government to prioritize this issue. USAID’s Resource Guide also outlines how the government and other countries can address child, early, and forced marriage through multi-sectoral and sector-specific approaches. Still, there are steps that the U.S. government can take to more sustainably and holistically address child marriage:

1. **Provide robust funding for programs that seek to prevent child marriage and meet the needs of married girls.** In recent years, the U.S. government has set aside \$11 million in development assistance for programs that address child, early, and forced marriage and \$150 million for programs to combat gender-based violence, including child, early, and forced

marriage. This funding allows adolescent girls to achieve their potential and give them the tools and resources needed to thrive now and into adulthood. Empowering young women and girls to realize their rights, receive education, and delay marriage has strong indicators for healthier communities, stronger economies, and longer-lasting peace, and it contributes to other U.S. government development objectives. However, the president's budget requests for fiscal years 2019 and 2020 have proposed significant cuts to this funding and to the funding of health and family planning services for adolescent girls. We recommend Congress appropriate no less than previously enacted levels and, if possible, that funding dedicated to ending child marriage globally is increased.

2. Meaningfully include the voices of adolescent girls and young women in all programming design and implementation. We recommend increased attention and support to girls' agency across the board, including in the design, implementation, and accountability mechanisms of the USAID Gender Policy, the Adolescent Girl Strategy, and any other U.S. strategies or initiatives directly impacting them. Children and young people can play a significant role as agents of transformation, in accordance with their evolving capacities and increasing autonomy. When they are afforded the opportunity to communicate their opinions, are encouraged to take responsibility, and are invited to participate in decision-making processes, young people develop a sense of belonging, justice, responsibility, and solidarity.⁶¹

3. Establish a cross-agency working group to review existing strategies, structures, and indicators, and improve effectiveness and coordination of U.S. government efforts to end child marriage globally. Adolescent girls face a unique set of challenges, including some of the highest rates of violence and new HIV infections. Adolescent girls are less likely to attend school than their male peers and the leading cause of death amongst girls ages 15-19 is pregnancy. By bringing together the expertise and strength of relevant U.S. agencies, such as the U.S. Department of State, USAID, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Department of Labor (DOL), the Peace Corps, and the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), the U.S. government can more strategically work to address barriers to the

empowerment of adolescent girls. This cross-agency working group should have high-level leadership from USAID and should develop a report for Congress every two years on the status and progress of U.S. efforts to end child marriage globally. This report should also include recommendations for ways to more strategically work with other governments, civil society, and the private sector.

4. Demonstrate strong global leadership in committing to end child marriage by 2030. In addition to increasing funding to address child marriage, the U.S. government can strengthen its global leadership and commitment to SDG 5.3 through strong high-level political participation and engagement in global forums. The U.S. government should continue to prioritize SDG 5.3 and push for provisions against child marriage in bilateral settings as well as multilateral forums such as the Human Rights Council, the United Nations General Assembly, and in reports on progress towards SDG 5.3 and SDG 16.2. As the United Nations periodically reviews the human rights conditions and records of its member states, we recommend the U.S. engage more actively in national-level policy change through the Universal Periodic Reviews of the Human Rights Council. This information can be used to inform and direct advocacy efforts by NGOs and other partners on the ground to encourage positive change that respects the rights of young women and girls. The U.S. can also demonstrate leadership by joining the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children, a public-private collaboration that includes UN agencies, governments, industry, regional bodies, civil society, young people, advocates, and champions focused on making the world safer for children.

5. Support multi-sectoral approaches and develop standard outcome-level indicators across agencies within the U.S. government working to end child marriage. Currently, multi-sectoral programs are funded through multiple sources that require different reporting structures. This complex funding matrix creates additional work for implementing agencies and USAID, and discourages effective, multi-sectoral collaboration. USAID has a cross-sectoral resource guide^{vii} with illustrative indicators that should be utilized by all Missions. Missions should be given oversight over how funding is packaged and awarded to reduce complexity and drive resources

vii https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1865/USAID_CEFM_Resource-Guide.PDF

to achieve desired outcomes. These outcomes should be reported consistently and shared transparently. The U.S. Government should also support research to determine which multi-sectoral interventions are most impactful for addressing child marriage in specific contexts. Best practices should be implemented and shared to strengthen future efforts to address child marriage. This will result in more effective and sustainable programming while also maximizing the investments of donors. We also recommend multi-sectoral approaches to ending child marriage align with the INSPIRE framework, which provides an evidence-based, multi-sectoral approach to ending violence against children, including child marriage. This framework and its subsequent indicators, developed by the World Health Organization in consultation with CDC, USAID, and PEPFAR, should guide collaborative efforts to end child marriage.

6. **The Women's Global Development and Prosperity (W-GDP) initiative should recognize child marriage as a significant barrier to women's economic empowerment and take measures to address the practice.** In February of 2019, the White House announced the Women's Global Development and Prosperity Initiative (W-GDP). Established in a national security memorandum signed by President Trump, W-GDP is the first-ever whole-of-government approach to women's economic empowerment. W-GDP exists as a guiding framework

to promote women's economic empowerment and has three core pillars. The third pillar focuses on eliminating the legal, regulatory, and cultural barriers that prevent women from participating in their local economies. Child marriage represents a critical cultural barrier to girls' education and empowerment. Without an enabling environment where they can access health care, receive an education, and have their human and legal rights respected, women and girls are not able to excel. Additionally, they are unable to access the resources this initiative seeks to provide in its first two pillars—entrepreneurship and workforce development—without an enabling environment. Only when we empower girls are we able to empower women and reach the initiative's stated goal of economically empowering 50 million women by 2025.

7. **Continue to monitor country-level progress on ending child marriage and report these metrics in the State Department's Human Rights Reports.** In 2012, the State Department made a strategic decision to include child marriage as a reporting requirement in its annual human rights reports. The U.S. government should maintain robust and standardized reporting requirements to measure the incidence of child marriage, the existence and implementation of laws against child marriage, access to education and opportunities for adolescent girls, and other indicators of girls' empowerment as a part of the broader human rights landscape.



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