

Child Marriage

EMERGING TRENDS
IN THE MEDIA



Maya, 8, and Kishore, 13, pose for a wedding photo inside their new home, the day after the Hindu holy day of Akshaya Tritiya in North India.

PHOTO CREDIT: Stephanie Sinclair/ Too Young to Wed

National Press Club
October 7, 2015
Washington, DC

Dear friends:

The media fulfills many functions, informing the public of current affairs, holding decision-makers accountable and revealing the truth behind the stories that shape our lives and history. In recent years, attention paid to child marriage and the injustices faced by adolescent girls has grown, thanks in part to media coverage of these topics around the globe.

Our intention in organizing this event was to provide an overview and exploration of the role and impact of mainstream, advocacy, and popular culture and social media coverage of child marriage. We also hoped to identify opportunities to enhance the influence of the media and to ensure responsible storytelling.

Presenters shared revealing analyses of the ideas and images presented in the media. They showcased innovative approaches from around the world that are starting to chip away at the social and gender norms that perpetuate child marriage, inspire increasing numbers of people to take action against it, and encourage decision-makers from local communities and international institutions to commit to protecting girls' rights and ending the practice. The event acknowledged the significant role media have played as a way for girls to tell their own stories and help catalyze world opinion against the custom.

A number of key findings emerged throughout the discussion:

- **The media can and should play an important role in shaping public discourse on social issues, child marriage among them.**
- **The media need to be mobilized as an important contributor to development.**
- **The media must walk a fine line between advocacy and credibility.**
- **Some specific strategies support and expand the reach of media stories.**
- **The ethics of portrayal constitute an important mandate for the media.**
- **The assembled group identified the importance of the media's own accountability to the communities and individuals they cover.**

Please feel free to contact any of the individuals referenced in the report for more information about the event.

Best wishes,



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CHILD MARRIAGE: EMERGING TRENDS IN THE MEDIA

WEDNESDAY, 7 OCTOBER 2015

1PM - 5PM

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

Opening remarks – Shari Turitz, Vice President for Programs, American Jewish World Service and Lyric Thompson, International Center for Research on Women, Girls Not Brides USA Co-Chair

Mainstream media – Nurith Aizenman, Correspondent, Global Health and Development, National Public Radio - USA

Bishakha Datta, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Point of View

Kathy Bonk, Executive Director, Communications Consortium Media Center

Pushpa Jamieson, Media Consultant/Training Facilitator and Journalist

Advocacy media – Kathy Spillar, Ms. Magazine

Samiullah Mahdi, Director of Payk Investigative Journalism Center, creator of Kabul TV1 "Niqab"

Steve Holmes, Executive Director, CNN, Standards and Practice

Stephanie Sinclair, Visual Journalist and Founding Executive Director of Too Young To Wed

Popular culture and social media – Helena Minchew, International Women's Health Coalition, Girls Not Brides USA Co-Chair

Heidi Nel, "Difret" outreach campaign coordinator, Picture Motion

Meghana Rao, Deputy Director of Campaigns, Breakthrough TV

Megan Mylan, Director, "After My Garden Grows"

Closing remarks and next steps – Dena Kimball, Kendeda Fund

Please join us for a reception following the panel discussions.

Join the conversation on social media with the hashtag **#Lead4Girls**.

Twitter handles:

@msmagazine @Int'lWomen @ajws @GirlsNotBrides @Greene_Works @CCMctweets

Sponsoring organizations:



Introduction and welcome

After thanking the organizers and speakers in her opening remarks, **Shari Turitz** (*Vice President for Programs, American Jewish World Service*) noted that the overflow attendance reflected the unprecedentedly high level of interest in ending early and child marriage globally. This interest has arisen at an historic moment, when 150 world leaders at the United Nations have endorsed 17 Sustainable Development Goals, including a specific target to end Child, Early and Forced Marriage.

Early and child marriage persists globally:

- 15 million girls are married before the age of 18 every year. In India, where half of early/child marriage occurs, the median age at marriage is actually 17.
- 720 million women alive today were married before they turned 18.
- The second leading cause of death among girls aged 15-19 is complications in pregnancy and childbirth.
- Early/child marriage is about controlling girls' sexuality, but that taboo subject is hardly ever discussed.

- What looks wrong to us seems right to parents for a variety of reasons: economic reasons, to avoid social shame, or fear of their daughters being left behind or abused as unmarried women.

Reaching this Sustainable Development Goal on child marriage by 2030 will involve more than simply creating and enforcing laws. We need to shift social norms through the use of crucially important tools like the strategic use of media. The practice is widespread and complex, but so is our global network and our tools. So let's get started!

Lyric Thompson (*International Center for Research on Women, Girls Not Brides-USA*) spoke about the need to go beyond speaking to the "congress of the converted" to educate and engage new audiences and drive real change. We know child marriage is a violation of human rights, that it disproportionately impacts girls and that it thrives in the context of discriminatory gender norms that simply don't value girls the same as boys. The problem is... we usually sit around talking to ourselves about it. She was recently given hope, however, when she met a firefighter from West Virginia at a wedding there, and he knew about child marriage and believed it was a good issue for the United States to be tackling abroad. He had learned about the issue from his exposure to the **TED talk** by girl activist Memory Banda from Malawi, and a 2012 *Washington Post* op-ed by elders Graça Machel and



Archbishop Desmond Tutu that called for U.S. action. (Their op-ed urged the passage of **legislation** that had been introduced in the U.S. Congress and called on the executive agencies under the leadership of the Obama Administration to make child marriage a foreign policy priority.)

Girls Not Brides USA (GNB-USA) had the opportunity to collaborate with the Pulitzer-prize winning photographer Stephanie Sinclair, and her traveling photo exhibit of powerful images, called “Too Young To Wed.” GNB-USA staged these photographs in the U.S. Senate rotunda; later that year the Congress passed the U.S. Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage act. These pictures drew in and mobilized policymakers as people, not merely as policymakers.

Lyric emphasized the importance of covering child marriage in a way that honors girls as human beings...the way that President Obama highlighted child marriage during a trip to Africa, and praised the work of indigenous activists who are reducing the prevalence of child marriage and empowering girls in their communities.

The film “Difret”, executive produced by Angelina Jolie, has been a powerful advocacy tool. *Ms. Magazine* devoted an entire issue to child marriage groups like ICRW and Girls Not Brides USA working to end it and featured Jolie on its cover. GNB-USA screened the film last fall, and invited relevant staff in the State Department Global Women’s Issues Office and USAID. “Difret” colleagues designed a petition calling on the U.S. Government to end child marriage; this petition was delivered to the Department of State in late September 2015 with more than 135,000 signatures. It elicited promises by State Department officials to publish an Adolescent Girl Strategy during 2016.

The coalition has used social media to thank and appreciate the U.S. Government when it does good things for girls, and, occasionally, to call them out for a lack of action. It has used the hash tag #endchildmarriage in the course of campaigns to get this issue on the agenda, and more recently, #Lead4Girls, to call for smart policy, solid implementation, and full funding.

PANEL 1 Mainstream media

In the panel on Mainstream Media, journalist **Nurith Aizenman** (*Correspondent, Global Health and Development, National Public Radio*) emphasized the importance of not telling the story as if girls were passive victims. Every girl deserves an in-depth profile that portrays her as a full human being with her own individuality. Information about the context and possible solutions should be included. The journalist is in the business of engaging people and helping them identify with the story. Nurith summarized the story she had been working on, which was aired on **NPR** on October 28: Nimmu is a Rajasthani girl of 15 in boarding school. Nimmu is in the period of *gauna*, in which a young, already-married girl remains at her birth home for several years until the *gauna* ceremony when she moves to her husband’s and in-laws’ home. Additional pressure is coming from her father, who needs Nimmu to pass the national school examination to deflect the pressure being placed on him.

Bishakha Datta (*Co-Founder and Executive Director, Point of View*) highlighted aspects of media portrayals

of early and child marriage that deserve closer examination and critique. Bishakha noted that, in media coverage, images of children under age 13 are most prevalent, even though typically it is older adolescents who are getting married, thereby influencing our emotional

response to early marriage. We also use different age groupings in our language to describe similar issues, e.g., “teenage pregnancy” and “child marriage.” In addition, although media coverage has increased tenfold since 2010, it has been inconsistent in different national and cultural contexts. Bishakha urged us to ask exactly what is meant by the terms “consent” and “force” when we talk about early and child marriage, or forced marriage. Furthermore, the colorful language of global media coverage reinforces neo-colonial discourse when it describes early and child marriage in troubling language that conjures up images of the medieval and barbaric. Using the example of *Akshaya Tritiya*, a Hindu tradition in India, a day for auspicious beginnings, Bishakha pointed out that many





people, including adults, are married on this day, not just children under age 18.

And yet, media coverage takes a crime-and-punishment approach, casting parents as criminals, even though families who marry off their children at a young age are not necessarily evil villains. Bishakha also reminded us that we need to clarify the differences between child marriage and child trafficking. While trafficking tends to be portrayed visually through pictures, media coverage of child marriage does not reflect the children's own thoughts about child marriage. Bishakha concluded by noting the huge opportunity to hear girls' voices (not just their images) and to cover the missing middle in media coverage, i.e., the girls marrying at ages 16 to 17.

Kathy Bonk (*Executive Director, Communications Consortium Media Center*) summarized her 2013 study that showed that only a third of global media coverage in English raised awareness and, in general, did not say anything about solutions. In 2013, only one in ten of the stories on child marriage featured successful programs, and only a handful of the global media that influence policymakers covered child marriage. In 2015, there have been slightly fewer stories, but the coverage is of better quality and much more substantive. Influential outlets, including business media, have given more coverage to the issues. The visuals have been stronger with more realistic portrayals of girls, and several major media have expanded coverage to a series of feature pieces and serious news stories. More young women have been recognized as spokespeople, with the most quoted being Malala Yousafzai. The issues related to child marriage in this coverage have been education, but also health, violence and human rights. India, Pakistan and Nigeria topped the list for featuring the most in the news, with 43 percent of the stories about these three countries. Eighteen other

countries were featured in coverage with at least 100 stories about each one.

Three stories clearly moved people and created a teachable moment: Malala Yousafzai, the African Union multi-year campaign to end child marriage, and the kidnapping of schoolgirls from Chibok in Nigeria. And finally, there was a significant shift in story lines and narratives: 25% of the stories were on problems, and 27% on successes and results. However, backlash stories are creeping into mainstream media with 3% featuring pieces about policy reversals that *support* child marriage in proposals from Pakistan and Iraq. Major breakthroughs came from several media outlets: The *New York Times* Magazine did a feature by Stephanie Sinclair with photographs, videos and commentary on Guatemala, broadening the coverage to Latin America and *Ms.* magazine did a cover story early in 2015 that featured "Difret", advocacy groups and action steps for readers.

Kathy Bonk urged us to ensure that authentic voices are heard as the stories move up the media food chain. The community needs to address some emerging understandings of child marriage: one theme in Latin America, for example, is the experience of girls who *want* to be married and sexually active in their teens. More nuanced research and messaging are needed to describe the forces that lead girls to marry and the experiences they have within marriage.

Introducing marriage issues in Malawi, journalist **Pushpa Jamieson** (*Media Consultant, Training Facilitator and Journalist*) pointed out that although 18 years is the age of mar-



riage in the Constitution (**Chapter IV, art. 22**), the document permits marriage for persons ages 15-18 with parental consent. The constitution obligates the government to discourage marriage before age 15. Despite having signed many international policies and protocols, Malawi faces several obstacles to implementation: the nation is not involved in creating these standards, which leads to a lack of information; lack of political will, because most politicians are men and have not thought critically about gender discrimination; and lack of continuity and accountability. Regarding child marriage, Pushpa observed that the media mostly writes about political and not social issues. The majority of media outlets are owned by the government. The Population Reference Bureau conducted a media training of journalists to focus on social issues and child marriage, at the end of which it was clear that Malawi's media had a gap they needed to fill: covering the experience of victims. Going forward, the media's role will be to continue providing appropriate information, being a watchdog for the new Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations Bill, and encouraging implementation and accountability. The Bill was passed into law on the 12 February 2015.

Questions and answers

- *In Malawi, there has been greatly increased coverage of child marriage. With the new law in place, who is going to ensure its implementation?* The media will play a key role in maintaining pressure on the government to operationalize the law.
- *What about legal issues around identification of the child who has married?* There are ways to tell stories especially in interviews with older girls who can tell their stories in the past. The legislative protections of children that are applied in the U.S. could be applied to child marriage as well. Another response to this question noted that many marriages in India are arranged by girls' families. As this arranging is a sign of status in the Indian context, there may be less risk in revealing girls' names in coverage of cases of child marriage.
- *What about family planning and early marriage – were these connections covered?* Indeed, child marriage and population growth and family planning are closely interconnected. But lack of privacy is a real issue for young girls, and their ability to choose to regulate their fertility and their access to services are sharply limited.

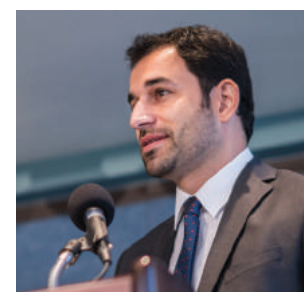
PANEL 2 Advocacy media

In the second panel, on Advocacy Media, **Kathy Spillar** (*Ms. magazine*) stated that advocacy is what *Ms.* unapologetically does. Always focused on solutions, *Ms.* began covering the issue very early as a violation of girls' and women's human rights, and not as a social custom and cultural practice, which is how it was addressed in some of the mainstream media. The magazine has a strong point of view and tries to accomplish the following:



- ◆ Inform and arouse public opinion to impact public decision-makers
- ◆ Reach decision-makers with the information on the problem and solutions that they need
- ◆ Connect readers with the resources they need to become effective actors, e.g., the *Ms.* issue on child marriage referenced organizations working on child marriage
- ◆ Hold politicians accountable
- ◆ Push mainstream media to cover particular issues

Talking about his concept for the “**Niqab**” TV show in Afghanistan, **Samiullah Mahdi** (**PAYK Investigative Journalism Center**, creator of Kabul TV1 show, “**Niqab**”) noted that discussing problems in Afghanistan is a taboo; women will not dare to talk about domestic violence because it is related to the honor of the family, and their lives may be at stake. To get past this obstacle to speaking, Sami had the idea of using a mask that covered the face of the victims willing to come and talk, thereby creating a forum for victims to share their painful stories with a panel of lawmakers, clerics, activists and professors who would talk about solutions and prevention. Noting that 46% of women in



Afghanistan marry by age 18 and 15% under age 15, Sami Mahdi listed three areas of focus:

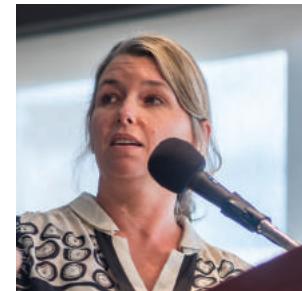
- ◆ **Education for women and for men** the target audience of “Niqab” is men, because men control the society and control women;
- ◆ **Economic empowerment of women** especially since inheritance rights are not respected;
- ◆ **Law enforcement** many laws support the rights of women, but the reigning mentality does not, especially among law enforcement officers.

In closing, Sami highlighted the recent violence in Kunduz, noting that the Taliban are now enslaving women and committing gang rape, techniques they have newly learned from ISIL. What will happen if the world abandons Afghanistan? We will have what the Taliban is doing in addition to the traditional violence.

Steve Holmes (*Executive Director, CNN, Standards and Practice*) offered a critical analysis of media practices in his line of work. He felt that his job makes him the antithesis of advocacy media: He looks at scripts and packages that are controversial or sensitive to ensure that they are balanced, fair, contextualized, and in good taste. The lawyers ask: Can we do that? And the Standards and Practice team asks: Should we do that? Noting the difficulty in separating advocacy journalism from news journalism, Steve gave two examples: the **Heroes** package, and the piece on Josephine Kulea in Kenya, who started a school for young girls she had rescued from child marriage and female genital cutting/mutilation. Heroes clearly allowed unabashed advocacy for its subjects by focusing on the heroism of Kakenya Ntaiya and her work to end child marriage and FGM and promote girls’ schooling among her community, the Maasai. On the other hand, when a

village elder who did not approve of Kulea’s work was included in the story about her work, the piece was engaging in the closest thing the mainstream media do to advocacy: consciousness-raising. Mainstream advocacy can generally engage in explicit advocacy only by telling a story that focuses on a sympathetic character. This increases the odds of coverage, too. Steve ended with an exhortation to people interested in increasing thoughtful coverage for stories of child marriage: tie your stories to the big issues of the day, i.e., make the connections between child marriage and the wars currently being fought.

Stephanie Sinclair (*Visual Journalist, Founding Executive Director of Too Young to Wed*) shared her experiences and approach to telling girls’ stories. She began covering child marriage in Afghanistan when she was working there as a conflict reporter, and saw girls in Herat setting themselves on fire because of problems in their marriages. Many of the girls in the burn ward had been married at age 9, 10 or 11. Stephanie could not show the pictures without talking about why these girls had done this. The girls themselves described their sale by their families to men who kept them as slaves. When she came to editors with the story, they could not believe it.



Stephanie noted that her initial story in *National Geographic* has led to a lot of attention and coverage. She has been to more than 10 countries to take photographs on this issue. She feels she is more of a mainstream news journalist on other issues, but, when it comes to women and girls’ rights, she has become an open advocate. She



tries to speak about it in a way that defends the communities in general. More recently, her *New York Times* piece on child brides in Guatemala ([available here](#)) that was funded by UNFPA was the most-read story for the first half of February 2015. The exhibition of **Too Young To Wed** at the United Nations showed photographs accompanied by the quotes of girls and has now traveled to 27 countries. Stephanie observed that it was difficult to get funding to do nuanced reporting. She does go back to visit the girls whose stories she covers, and is now training girls who are survivors so they can tell their own stories.

Questions and answers

- ◆ Regarding the funding of advocacy journalism, it was noted that the financial crunch is being felt throughout mainstream media, although partnerships will still produce strong journalism.
- ◆ Groups not associated with the media are now supporting these kinds of stories, which explains, in part, why *Too Young to Wed* became a non-profit – to facilitate other kinds of partnerships.
- ◆ **PAYK** has a partnership with the UN and Internews, but is looking for partners to work on inheritance rights, as well as partners to support their investigative reporting on the situation in Kunduz. Support for investigative journalism is more important than ever, and journalists in the field needed to get paid for their work.
- ◆ The panelists were also asked how they plan to link their stories to the broader development agenda, given that people at the top make the important decisions, including resource allocation.

PANEL 3 Popular culture and social media

Time and again, we have seen that facts and statistics aren't enough to enthrall the public or convince decision-makers to commit resources, noted **Helena Minchew** (*International Women's Health Coalition, Co-chair of Girls Not Brides USA*). We need to tell a story, to put recognizable faces to the 15 million girls who are married every year, to show the public and the decision-makers that these aren't numbers—these are people. And that is where popular culture, social media, and today's panelists come in. When we engage on social media, when we share stories of the people who are living the issues we discuss, we see the most passion, the most excitement and the most will to actually engage in bringing about change. When Girls Not Brides USA helped Stephanie Sinclair bring *Too Young to Wed* to Capitol Hill, that was when we saw Congressmen and women and their staff sit up and take notice. It was when Girls Not Brides USA hosted a screening of the film “*Difret*” for U.S. Government officials that their hearts were drawn into the fight against child marriage.

Helena reminded the audience that “*Difret*” is an award-winning feature film (executive producer Angelina Jolie Pitt) about a legal precedent-setting court case in Ethiopia that outlawed the kidnapping of child brides. The film premiered at Sundance Film Festival last year, winning the audience award, and is currently in theatrical release around the world. “*Difret*” was made to have an impact on child marriage in Ethiopia and beyond, so the large impact campaign associated with it includes a partnership with Girls Not Brides USA. As part of their work in the U.S., “*Difret*'s” team and the young woman at the center of the film created a petition to President Obama, Secretary Kerry and others in the U.S. Government, calling on the U.S. Government to write, release and implement an adolescent girls strategy. It was recently delivered to the State Department with over 140,000 signatures.

Heidi Nel (“*Difret*” Outreach Campaign Coordinator, *Picture Motion*) talked about the work they are doing to ensure that “*Difret*” sits solidly at the intersection of story and advocacy. The “*Difret*” team is conducting “impact distribution”, partnering with groups that get the film to the theater and then ensure that, as people see the



movie, there are clear steps they can take to contribute to ending child marriage. The U.S. release on October 23 was key to generating media about breaking numbers at the box office. Heidi suggested ways in which the film can advance the cause, including getting signatures for the [www.Change.org/Difret petition](http://www.Change.org/Difret), which has already been endorsed by numerous partners. The film overcomes the idea of “people who have nothing in common with us,” and encourages local and global accountability.

Meghana Rao (*Deputy Director of Campaigns, Breakthrough TV*) described Breakthrough’s work at all levels, including the use of social media, and training local actors in 6 key states in India. Breakthrough TV has reached over 240 million people in India with their flagship mass media campaign, Nation Against Early Marriage, and 7.5 million people in direct interaction efforts. In addition to training influential community members and local actors for social change, Breakthrough works in the communities of the Indian states of Bihar and Jharkhand, which have some of the highest rates of child marriage in the country.

Breakthrough connects media with program implementation, which includes: facilitating community dialogue; building the agency of youth, including empowering girls to push for their own education; *melas* or public fairs; video vans; and educating young people about their rights.

Breakthrough’s current strategy includes:

- ◆ Mass media messaging that emphasizes the role of men and boys
- ◆ Community mobilization
- ◆ Community based media and mobile technology – this is very strong where the practice of child marriage is prevalent

◆ Using the press for advocacy

Breakthrough is currently involved in a randomized control trial to evaluate the impact of three intervention components: mass media, training, and community mobilization. The metaphor they use to describe their work is to treat public opinion as an “ecosystem” that must be strengthened to protect the rights of girls.

Megan Mylan (*Director, “After My Garden Grows”*) was introduced as an Academy Award-winning documentary filmmaker whose films include *Lost Boys of Sudan* and *Smile Pinki*. Megan was here to tell us about her **short documentary** film. “After My Garden



Grows” looks at child marriage through the story of Monika Barman, an Indian teenager who is part of a girls’ gardening and empowerment program in the Indian state of West Bengal through the nongovernmental organization (NGO), Landesa. The second film from the panelists to premiere at the Sundance Film Festival, “After My Garden Grows” had a unique theatrical release and high-magnitude social engagement campaign in India. As the **India Documentary Foundation** asks: “What do India’s #1 dating site, largest movie chain, a federal cabinet minister, a titan of industry, a celebrated fashion designer, a Bollywood power couple and a rural teenager have in common? For 2 weeks in November, these amazing Indians and many others came together to share a film and rally support for India’s girls.”

Megan reported that the film was taken up by several celebrities, including a wedding designer and the movie

star Aamir Khan who, with his wife, hosted a screening. This was in keeping with their priorities for the release of the film in India, which were to generate meaningful media coverage for girls' empowerment, and to bring new influential Indians to the issue. A **social media campaign** also rallied support for India's girls. Online organizing is valuable, because it is free and accessible, and can be tracked and measured. The online wedding service Shaadi.com sponsored the film to play as a short alongside others. Over 200 media stories were generated during the 2-week publicity blitz. By bringing the family members of the protagonist and Landesa staff to give interviews, the media was encouraged to expand the story. Megan noted that there is no avoiding the "movieness" of the project, such as the requirement that the director being interviewed, because a story cannot reach the arts page of a publication if only the people whose stories are being told are interviewed. It was important to keep the protagonist in the center of the story, and to be sure to loop back to the program.

In the Question and Answer session, it was noted that in order to overcome people's resistance to talking to the media, it was important to find someone who has the trust of the community, and then earn that person's trust. It was agreed that, if there is not a feeling of comfort, there will be no film. Among the additional resources mentioned were the Nigerian film industry's (Nollywood) **Champions for Change** on sexual and reproductive health and rights for youth.

Conclusions and next steps

Helena Minchew introduced Dena Kimball, Executive Director of the Kendeda Fund. As Helena Minchew noted in introducing her, this event on child marriage in the media is an example of Dena's support for girls around the world via dialogue on this complex practice, bringing together diverse voices and players to generate and elevate creative approaches to ending child marriage.

Dena Kimball, *Executive Director of the Kendeda Fund*, which supported the event, encouraged the audience to tell their stories responsibly, but also to take some creative and journalistic risks, to try new frames, and to utilize new voices to tell these important stories.

Recommendations

Six recommendations emerged repeatedly as themes of the panel presentations and discussion with the audience. The discussion acknowledged the difficulties in obtaining funding for the kind of nuanced reporting discussed throughout the event.

The media can and should play an important role in shaping public discourse on social issues, child marriage among them. The media inform the public about critical social issues and influence the way those issues are framed in public discourse. We heard about the importance of film for overcoming the idea of child marriage being a problem among "people who have nothing in common with us," and encourage local and global accountability. Men are important targets of media messaging about child marriage as the future husbands and important decision-makers in the lives of girls.

The media can also imbue the issues with the emotional content required to mobilize people to work on them. Time and again, we have seen that facts and statistics aren't enough to enthrall the public or convince decision-makers to take action. We need to tell stories with emotional and personal content, to put faces to the 15 million girls who are married every year, to show the public and the decision-makers that girls aren't numbers—they are people.

The media need to be mobilized as an important contributor to development. The panelists were also asked how they plan to link their stories to the broader development agenda, given that people at the top make the important decisions, including resource allocation. Reaching the Sustainable Development Goal on child marriage by 2030 will involve more than simply creating and enforcing laws. Social norms need to be shifted through the strategic use of media. Laws need to be disseminated and accountability ensured: the media play the role of "watchdog" over decision-makers to ensure they fulfill their responsibilities to protect and uphold the public's welfare. The accountability can be accomplished through carrots and not just sticks, as the experience of one coalition that has thanked and appreciated the U.S. Government when it does good things for girls, as well as, occasionally, calling them out for a lack of action.

The media must walk a fine line between advocacy and credibility. As we learned, the distinction between advocacy and something else is not always clear. Sometimes the selection of a story itself is advocacy. Mainstream advocacy can generally engage in explicit advocacy only by telling a story that focuses on a sympathetic character.

Media coverage reflects inconsistent concepts in different settings, and this can build or undermine credibility. Some specific terms that bear careful attention as they are used in media coverage include “teenage pregnancy” and “child marriage,” phrases that can refer to quite divergent age groups. Other concepts that deserve close scrutiny are “consent” and “force” when we talk about child, early and forced marriage. Colorful stories in the global media can reinforce neo-colonial discourse when it describes child, early and forced marriage in language that conjures up barbaric images of “the other.” Finally, we need to clarify the differences between child trafficking, which tends to be portrayed photographically, and media coverage of child marriage, which does not reflect children’s own thoughts about child marriage.

Some specific strategies support and expand the reach of media stories. One recommendation was to tie stories to the most prominent stories of the day to increase coverage, linking an increase in marriage to the conditions faced by Syrian refugees, for example. It was noted that stories that focus on sympathetic characters also increase the odds of coverage.

The ethics of portrayal constitute an important mandate for the media. A consensus emerged among the panelists and audience members on the importance of not telling stories as if girls were passive victims. More nuanced research and messaging are needed to describe the forces that lead girls to marry and their experiences within marriage. Girls deserve in-depth profiles that portray them as full human beings with their own individuality. Information about the context of their lives and possible responses to the constraints they face should be included so that readers know how to respond if the coverage mobilizes them. Coverage in the media represents a huge opportunity to hear girls’ voices and to cover the missing middle in media coverage, i.e., the girls marrying at ages 16 to 17. It is important to ensure that authentic voices are heard as the stories move up the media food chain. The media need to bear in mind some emerging understandings of child marriage: who want to get married and become mothers in their teens.

The assembled group identified the importance of the media’s own accountability to the communities and individuals they cover. Survivors need to be kept at the center of their own stories at all times. Survivors must be informed about where and how their own stories will be told. Without completely protecting the privacy and consent of the survivor, media representatives must not tell the story. Going even further, one response is to return to visit the girls whose stories an outlet covers; or to train girls who are survivors so they can tell their own stories.

SPEAKER BIOS

Child Marriage: Emerging Trends in the Media



Shari Turitz

SHARI TURITZ is the Vice President for Programs at AJWS, leading the Programs Division and overseeing AJWS's grant making, domestic and international strategy. She brings with her more than 20 years of experience in human rights grantmaking, capacity building and advocacy, and 15 years of senior management and program development experience. Shari began her career as a human rights activist working to end U.S. intervention in the Salvadoran and Guatemalan civil wars. Shari worked for The Synergos Institute for more than a decade, where she led its largest global program to develop leadership networks of civil society professionals in Asia, Africa and the Americas. Before joining AJWS in 2013, Shari served as director of programs for the Open Society Foundation's Public Health Program, co-leading a 55-person global team of international grant makers and advocates. Shari holds a B.A. in political science and Latin American studies from Tufts University and an M.A. from the Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs. You can reach her at sturitz@ajws.org.

LYRIC THOMPSON is Senior Policy Manager at the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW). She leads ICRW's formulation of evidence-based policy recommendations and manages its advocacy efforts with



Lyric Thompson

the U.S. Government and Internationally. Lyric also serves as co-chair of the Girls Not Brides USA advocacy coalition, on the steering committee of the Coalition to End Gender-Based Violence Globally, and plays a leadership role in various other coalitions advancing the global policy agenda on women and girls. She is a women's issues expert and blogger for the Thomson-Reuters Foundation and a primary expert and strategist for Amnesty International USA's women's human rights program. In 2011, Diplomatic Courier Magazine named her among the Top 99 Under 33 Young Professionals Impacting Foreign Policy. Lyric has addressed the UN General Assembly on harmful widowhood rituals and given testimony to the Human Rights Council's Special Working Group on Discrimination Against Women in Law and Practice. You can reach her at lthompson@icrw.org.

BISHAKHA DATTA (@busydot) works on gender and sexuality in the digital age, runs the non-profit Point of View in Mumbai, writes and films non-fiction works, is part of the wikipedia family, and serves on several non-profit boards. In all her work, Bishakha explores marginal, invisible, and silenced points of view—or those considered illegitimate. Bishakha's documentary work includes *In The*



Bishakha Datta

Flesh, a film on the lives of three sex workers, and *Taza Khabar*, which delves into a unique women-run rural newspaper. She has edited multiple books on women and gender inequality in India. In 2015, she launched the online imprint, *Deep Dives*, which publishes long-form journalism on 'the way we live now'. Bishakha, who started her working life as a journalist, is currently writing *#Selling Sex*, a book on the lives and realities of sex workers in India. You can reach her at bishakhadatta@gmail.com.

KATHY BONK is the executive director of CCMC, the Communications Consortium Media Center, a nonprofit, NGO based in Washington, DC. CCMC's mission is to use communications strategies for policy change. She is co-author of the Jossey-Bass book, *Strategic Communications for Nonprofits*. Over the past 35 years, Kathy has been at the forefront of dozens of media campaigns that marked a sea change in domestic and global policies on women's rights, child welfare, health care reform, early education, population, immigration reform, global health, a host of environmental issues and telecommunications. Most recently, Kathy has been working under a grant from the Ford Foundation to assist the African Union on their Campaign to End Child Marriage in Africa. As a part of the



Kathy Bonk



Meghana Rao

effort, CCMC is also working with Truth Aid, the producers of the feature film “Difret”, to help utilize the film as an education tool. She serves on the board of the National Press Club Journalism Institute, the National Council of Women’s Organizations, Pathfinder International, and the Kakenya Center for Excellence, a model girl’s school in Kenya. She is an advisor to *Ms.* and a variety of domestic and global groups working on women’s human rights. Kathy has a degree from the University of Pittsburgh in communications and resides in Washington, DC and Brooksville, Maine. You can reach her at kbonk@ccmc.org.

MEGHANA RAO is the Deputy Director of Breakthrough. She leads Breakthrough’s campaigning, communications and digital initiatives. Meghana has seen Breakthrough through its cutting edge campaigns on domestic violence - Bell Bajao!, Early Marriage and Sexual Harassment. She is a senior communications professional with extensive experience of designing and deploying strategic communication and planning campaigns. Her career spans 13 years, during which time she has integrated communication strategies, digital communications, campaigning and strategic communications. Meghana is a qualified Yoga acharya and practicing dance therapist. You can reach her at meghana@breakthrough.tv.

PUSHPA JAMIESON was born in Blantyre, Malawi and has also lived in Zimbabwe and the United Kingdom.



Pushpa Jamieson

In 1993, she and her husband Robert founded *The Chronicle Newspaper*, a life-long ambition. Together they registered their newspaper and ran it for 13 years before the government, unhappy with their honest reporting, forced them to shut it down. Their media consultancy work in Malawi began with trainings on climate change and environment for African journalists for the London-based Commonwealth Press Union (CPU). Together they began to engage in work that took them to Ghana, Mauritius, Mozambique and South Africa. Their work evolved to focus specifically on Malawi, working for Gender Links to put in place gender-friendly and HIV/AIDS-friendly policies in more than 24 major media houses, both print and electronic. Ms. Jamieson was supported by the Population Reference Bureau (PRB) to work with all media houses, giving them training, information and data pertaining to the effects of rapid population growth. You can reach her at pushpaane@hotmail.com.

KATHERINE SPILLAR is the Executive Director of the Feminist Majority Foundation and the Feminist Majority, national organizations working for women’s equality, empowerment, and non-violence. One of the founders, Spillar has been a driving force in executing the organizations’ diverse programs since 1987. Spillar is the Executive Editor of *Ms.* magazine, which the Feminist Majority Foundation has published since 2001. Under her oversight, *Ms.* won the prestigious “Maggie Award” for its investigation



Katherine Spillar

into the network of anti-abortion extremists connected to the murderer of Dr. George Tiller. Spillar has appeared frequently on national TV and radio shows, including 60 Minutes, the Rachel Maddow Show, The O’Reilly Factor, CNN, ABC Nightly News, CBS News, NBC, FOX, Politically Incorrect, and Hannity & Colmes. You can reach her at kspillar@feminist.org.

HELENA MINCHEW is a Program Associate at the International Women’s Health Coalition and provides strategic and administrative support for IWHC’s U.S. foreign policy portfolio through work with a number of technical and advocacy coalitions, including as co-chair of Girls Not Brides USA, and helps to define IWHC’s engagement with members of Congress and administration officials. Lena also advocates for the fulfillment of sexual and reproductive health and rights at the international level, having represented IWHC at the UN in New York, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and Geneva, Switzerland. Lena has her B.A. in Psychology and International Communication from Marist College and a Masters in International Human Rights from the University of Denver’s Josef Korbel School of International Studies, where she acted as Associate Managing Editor for Human Rights and Human Welfare, an online publication dedicated to human rights topics and issues. Helena has worked internationally in India and Switzerland, and was a Princeton in Asia fellow in Nan, Thailand. You can reach her at hminchew@iwhc.org.



Helena Minchew



Sami Mahdi

SAMI MAHDI is Chairman of the PAYK Investigative Journalism Center in Afghanistan. He previously worked as CEO of Khurshid TV (2013-2014) and as Director of News and Current Affairs at 1TV (2009-2012). At 1TV Mr. Mahdi produced and hosted such internationally acclaimed programs as “Kabul Debate Live,” “The Mask,” “Amaj” and others. In 2012 Mr. Mahdi was awarded the prestigious Knight International Journalism Award from the International Center for Journalists for his excellent and courageous reporting. Prior to joining 1TV, Mr. Mahdi began his career as a TV journalist in 2007 with Tolo TV, where he hosted a weekly “Hardtalk.” Mr. Mahdi studied at the School of Law and Political Science of Kabul University, graduating in 2009. Mr. Mahdi was also a lecturer at the university and an op-ed contributor to major publications including the BBC Persian website. He is currently pursuing his Master’s degree in International Relations at the University of Massachusetts Boston through a Fulbright Scholarship. You can reach him at mahdi.samiullah@gmail.com.

STEPHANIE SINCLAIR is known for gaining unique access to the most sensitive gender and human rights issues around the world. She has photographed the defining conflicts of the past decade with fearless persistence. Although she has covered the dramatic events of war, her most arresting works confront the everyday brutality faced by young girls. Sinclair’s 13-year project, *Too Young to Wed*, began after she met young Afghan women



Stephanie Sinclair

who had set themselves on fire as a result of being forced into marriage as children. From Afghanistan, she went on to photograph underage wives in more than 10 countries, including India, Ethiopia, Tanzania, South Sudan, Yemen, and the Americas. Her studies of domestic life in these contexts bring into sharp relief the physical and emotional tolls that entrenched social conventions can take on those most vulnerable to abuse. Sinclair’s images mark an exchange of trust and compassion. But by consenting to be photographed at their most vulnerable, the people depicted in these images also demonstrate a rare bravery.

Sinclair is also the Founding Executive Director of *Too Young to Wed*, a nonprofit that transforms influential advocacy into tangible action on the ground through partnerships with international and local NGOs and by supporting initiatives in the communities where the girls in our stories live. Sinclair’s honors for this project include three World Press Photo awards and exhibitions in 27 countries including prestigious venues such as at the United Nations (2012, 2014) and the Whitney Biennial (2010) in New York. She has also earned the 2008 CARE International Award for Humanitarian Reportage and The Overseas Press Club’s Olivier Rebbot Award (2009) for her work on female genital mutilation (FGM). Other honors include three Visa D’Or awards from the Visa Pour L’Image photojournalism festival in France and a Pulitzer Prize (2000). Sinclair’s photographs are regularly



Heidi Nel

published worldwide in respected outlets such as *National Geographic* and *The New York Times Magazine*. You can reach her at stephanie@stephaniesinclair.com.

HEIDI NEL is a Principal at Picture Motion, overseeing the DC office and playing a leading role in business development, campaign management and strategic initiatives. Prior to joining Picture Motion, Heidi served as Senior Vice President of Digital at FitzGibbon Media where she created social action campaigns that leveraged technology and storytelling to shape policy and create cultural change. Previous to her work at FitzGibbon she was a Senior Associate at Dewey Square Group – a WPP company – and led digital initiatives for non-profits, Fortune 50s, and social enterprises. Heidi began her career in Hollywood and made her first foray into digital media working for Ghost House Pictures. There she produced original series for Comcast’s Internet TV and broadcast network and went on to oversee marketing strategy for an annual slate of 30 films at Lions Gate Entertainment. Originally from South Africa, Heidi grew up in Colorado and studied Modern Dance at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts. She is a Partner of the Truman National Security Project, and in her free time she volunteers for New Leaders Council, a leadership institute that recruits young women and men from outside the traditional power structure and equips them with the skills necessary to be civic leaders in



Dena Kimball

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DENA KIMBALL is the executive director of The Kendeda Fund. She also oversees the Girls' Rights and the Gun Violence Prevention programs. Before joining The Kendeda Fund in 2014, Dena served as the Vice President of Network Support for Teach For All; the Vice President of Alumni Affairs and the Deputy Vice President of Admissions for Teach for America; and as the Executive Director of GirlVentures in San Francisco, a nonprofit organization with a mission to inspire adolescent girls to develop and express their strengths. Dena holds a master's degree in public policy from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and a bachelor's degree in political science from Emory University. As an independent consultant, Dena specialized in the curriculum development, management, strategic planning and development of nonprofit organizations focusing on youth. She has served as an associate director of development for Pacific Crest Outward Bound School and as a program specialist at the National Economic Development and Law Center. She was the founding Chair of American Jewish World Service's Global Circle and sits on the Board of the Directors of the Fugees Family. Dena lives in Atlanta, Georgia, with her husband and two daughters. You can reach her at dena@kendedafund.org.

NURITH AIZENMAN is NPR's correspondent for Global Health and



Nurith Aizenman

Development. She recently travelled to India to report an in-depth profile of a child bride. The piece ran in Fall 2015 on NPR's Morning Edition as part of a special NPR series telling the stories of 15-year-old girls around the globe who are trying to change their futures--often in the face of incredible risk, hardship, and stereotypes. Aizenman's other work has included helping to lead NPR's coverage of the 2014-2015 Ebola outbreak in West Africa—reporting on the ground from Liberia and then Sierra Leone as a part of a team that was honored with a George Foster Peabody Award for its “early and exceptionally deep” work on the epidemic. Aizenman has previously served as a national reporter and foreign correspondent for *The Washington Post*, and as Executive Editor of *The New Republic* magazine. You can reach her at aizenman@npr.org.

MEGAN MYLAN is a New York-based documentary filmmaker who creates intimate cinema vérité portraits that offer audiences unique insight into complex global issues. She has been recognized with an Academy Award®, Emmy-nominations, Independent Spirit Award and a Guggenheim Fellowship. Her films include: *Lost Boys of Sudan*, *Smile Pinki* and *Raça*. Through extensive international distribution and social action campaigns, Megan's films have raised millions of dollars for charitable causes, motivated thousands to volunteer and informed public policy on issues as diverse as child marriage, racism,



Megan Mylan

refugee resettlement, global health, police violence and senior care.

Before beginning in documentary, Megan worked with Ashoka, an international development non-profit, in the U.S. and Brazil. She has a Bachelor's from Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service and Masters' degrees in Journalism and Latin American Studies from the University of California at Berkeley. She serves on the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences' Executive Committee for Documentary and was recently guest director of the Documentary program at Berkeley's Graduate School of Journalism. You can reach her at meganmylan@gmail.com.

STEVEN HOLMES is Executive Director of Standards and Practices at CNN, having served there since 2008. Before joining CNN, Holmes was the national domestic policy editor at the Washington Post for three years and spent the previous 15 at the *New York Times* as a reporter, covering race and demographic issues, Congress, Presidential campaigns and the State Department, and as editor in the Washington bureau overseeing domestic news coverage. While at the *New York Times*, Holmes was part of a team of journalists awarded the *Pulitzer Prize* in 2001 for reporting on race relations in America in a 15-part series, “How Race is Lived in America.” He is also the author of “Ron Brown: An Uncommon Life” (John Wiley & Sons, 2000), a biography of the former commerce secretary and Chairman of



Steven Holmes

the Democratic Party, who died while working in the Clinton Administration.

While working at Time magazine, Holmes covered national and local politics, agricultural issues, sports, including the 1984 Olympics, international finance, the Supreme Court and the Department of Justice. Holmes began his journalism career as a police reporter for the Herald Statesman in Yonkers, NY. He also worked for United Press International in Dallas and the Atlanta Constitution, in Atlanta, GA. Born in Brooklyn, Holmes grew up in Mt. Vernon, NY. He is a graduate of City College of New York and the Michele Clark Memorial Program for Minority Journalists, which was begun by the late Robert Maynard and was the precursor to the Institute for Journalism Education. He put himself through school by driving a New York City taxicab at night, and still insists that this was the second best job he's ever had. You can reach him at Steve.Holmes@turner.com.

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