

Messaging framework: Women Deliver 2016: Child marriage and the SDGs (health, reproductive rights, gender equality, education and economic empowerment)

Top-line message

Now is the time to act on child marriage. We have an SDG target (5.3) aimed at eliminating child marriage, but we now need to implement it in a way that will ensure gender equality and women's empowerment by 2030. Ending child marriage is everyone's responsibility: all sectors have a role to play and incorporating ways to end child marriage will help them achieve their goals.

Supporting messages

1. Ending child marriage will help us to achieve gender equality, empower all women and girls, and help all sectors to achieve their development goals

Child marriage is a human rights violation that denies girls and women their rights to health, education, equality, non-discrimination, and to live free from violence and exploitation, including slavery and servitude. By ending child marriage, we can accelerate progress towards achieving SDG target 5.3 aimed to eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage. We can also reduce maternal and child mortality, increase access to education and economic opportunities, achieve gender equality and build a more prosperous world for all.

Talking points:

- Ending child marriage is a strategic entry point to make progress on other issues, such as access to education for girls, reduced child mortality and improved maternal health, reproductive rights, and greater national productivity.
- Ending child marriage is not just about age; it's about equality. For progress to be sustainable we must tackle the root causes.
- Eliminating gender inequality and empowering young women requires the fulfilment of girls' basic needs and their right to education, access to economic opportunities, health and nutrition, and participation in decisions which affect them.
- There are simple actions sectors can take to make progress on development issues linked to child marriage, such as providing sexual and reproductive health education for adolescents, providing economic support and incentives to help families overcome financial barriers to school attendance, providing alternatives to marriage for girls by conducting livelihoods and vocational training, and engaging youth in the design, implementation, and evaluation of programmes

Proof points:

Gender-based violence

- Girls who marry before the age of 18 are more likely to experience gender based violence within marriage than girls who marry later

Education

- Girls with no education are three times more likely to marry early than those with secondary or higher education.
- Children of educated mothers have higher rates of immunisation and overall survival, lower rates of stunting and malnutrition, and are more likely to be better educated and marry later, than children of young less-educated mothers.
- Girls who are out of school, poor, and living in rural communities are at greater risk of both child marriage and food insecurity.
- An additional year of primary education for girl's results in a 15 per cent increase in future earnings and that figure increases with the level of education.

Health and nutrition

- Deaths among babies in their first few weeks of life are 50% higher among those born to mothers under 20 years of age than among those born to mothers in their 20s. They are also more likely to have a low birth weight which can cause long-term health damage
- Girls who are married young experience higher rates of anaemia and malnutrition than those who marry later in life.
- Girls who give birth between 15-19 years are much more likely to die in childbirth than girls 20-24 years and those under 15 are at even greater risk.

Economic empowerment, democracy, human rights, and governance

- Delaying marriage, keeping girls in school, and involving women in the formal labour market not only increases their individual income and economic empowerment, but can have ripple effects at the household, community, and national levels.
- Programmes that educate women and girls of their rights and engage them in advocating for their rights have great potential to increase female participation in civil and political decision-making

2. It is possible to end child marriage; we know what it will take

There is broad consensus on what needs to happen to end child marriage. Now is not the time to be complacent, now is the time to make it a reality.

Talking points:

- Ending child marriage on a global scale requires a long term, comprehensive and coordinated approach. There is no single solution to end child marriage.
 - An end to child marriage will only be achieved by working together in **partnership**.
 - Ending child marriage is the responsibility of everyone. Civil society, government, traditional leaders, youth, media, and others all have a role to play.
 - Partnering with **civil society** organisations that are addressing child marriage, understand the country context, and who have strong relationships in communities where child marriage is common is essential.
 - **Long-term:** Ending child marriage won't happen overnight. It requires long-term vision, investment and planning.
 - Actions that development sector could take to address the root causes of child marriage include:

- Change has to be supported and catalysed by **collective efforts at national, regional and international levels.**
- All those working to address child marriage should **evaluate programmes, share promising practices, and coordinate their efforts** to achieve maximum scale and impact.
- Recognising that child marriage does not take place in a vacuum, **efforts to end child marriage should not be isolated from broader development efforts** and should play an integral part in achieving development goals around the world.

3. The longer we wait, the bigger the problem will become

Millions of girls and women already suffer the consequences of child marriage. If we don't act now, the numbers of child brides will increase dramatically, with devastating consequences for girls and women across the globe.

Proof points:

- If we don't accelerate our efforts to end child marriage, 1.2Bn women will have been married as girls by 2050
 - While the practice of child marriage is slowly declining, due to population growth the number of child brides will continue to be high
- Girls' health, education and rights will be compromised
 - 95% of the world's births to adolescents occur in developing countries. 90% of these adolescent births are to girls already married or in a union.
 - Over sixty per cent of child brides in developing countries have had no formal education.

Further reading

International Center for Research on Women briefs:

[Taking action to address child marriage: the role of different sectors](#)

[Brief 1: Health](#)

[Brief 2: Education](#)

[Brief 3: Democracy, human rights, and governance](#)

[Brief 4: Economic growth and workforce development](#)

[Brief 5: Conflict and humanitarian crisis](#)

[Brief 6: Food security and nutrition](#)

[Brief 7: Agriculture, energy, and the environment](#)

[Brief 8: Gender-based violence](#)

[Brief 9: Youth](#)

Girls Not Brides [Theory of Change](#)