

The Child Marriage Research to Action Network (the CRANK): Investing in and building the capacity of systems to address child marriage

CRANK research meeting 23 June 2021 – **Key takeaways**

Opening

Satvika Chalasani, UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage

Why do we need a systems approach to end child marriage?

- Structural solutions: working with policies, systems and institutions for structural change and impact (including influencing broader norms change).
- Specialised services: As we support services/systems for everyone, we need to keep girls at the center, and ensure that services are age- and gender-responsive.
- A systems-approach allows for scale and sustainability.
- Systems are not the magic solution, but an important aspect for a comprehensive response to child marriage.

Multiple impacts of Ethiopia’s Health Extension Programme on adolescent health and wellbeing: A quasi-experimental study 2002-2013

Silinganisiwe Dzumbunu, University of Cape Town, and William Rudgard, University of Oxford

- The health extension programme in Ethiopia focuses on outreach to girls in rural areas.
- The study evaluated the impact of the programme across 11 domains of adolescents’ health and well-being, including sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), child marriage, adolescent pregnancy and education.
- The study found no significant links between the programme and eg, nutrition or child labour. However, it did find a significant impact within six major areas: child marriage, literacy, numeracy, knowledge of fertility, early pregnancy and education enrolment.
 - For example, 92% of girls involved in the programme were **not** married as children compared to 73% of girls not targeted by the programme.
- A hypothesis on the positive impact of the programme on girls’ education is that if household members are healthy, girls are less likely to be pulled out of school for household/paid work.
- The engagement of female health extension workers, who need at least a grade 10 education to be employed, might also work as a positive factor to incentivise girls’ enrolment and attendance in school – seen as a valuable job to have.
- A hypothesis on the positive impact of the programme on child marriage is that the outreach workers also give information on harmful practices, as well as refer to further (health) services for girls at risk (including pathways for reporting cases of child marriage).

- Going forward, there is a need to further explore:
 - The impact of similar programmes with community health workers in other countries
 - Barriers to accessing SRHR information and services, including eg, attitudes among the health extension workers towards adolescents' access – and awareness in communities -of the services.
 - The causal pathways for change and the links between this programme and other social programmes/sectors in the country.
 - The impact of COVID-19 on girls and their families.

School to work transition for adolescent girls

Prof. Pauline Rose, Research for Equitable Access and Learning (REAL) Centre, University of Cambridge

- Looks at skills for livelihood opportunities that are secure, productive, safe and fulfilling (that they are not vulnerable to short-term change, pay is decent, free from violence and exploitation, and that girls have some possibility to choose what job to engage in).
- Skills needed are foundational, transferable and vocational: most often seen to be accessed through formal schooling.
- Many of the most disadvantaged children in sub-Saharan Africa do not make it to secondary school – focus since the 2000s has been mainly on primary school and numbers for secondary level have not changed much.
- This means that many are entering the workforce without very basic numeracy and literacy: a quarter of young people aged 15-24 in low-income countries are unable to read a single sentence.
- We know there is a close relation between gender, poverty and schooling.
- Young women who have not completed secondary education are more likely to be in low paid work (not paying above the poverty line) – the difference compared to young men is stark.
 - Several barriers lead to this, including the lack of education, gender norms, discrimination, risk of violence at work.
 - Young fathers have a much bigger chance to be in work compared to young mothers.
- Programmes addressing the gap between education and livelihood opportunities (eg, in Rwanda and Uganda) and that support the completion of secondary education and to set up own businesses (eg, in Malawi, Tanzania and Zambia) have shown positive results in increased incomes for girls. Financial empowerment programmes (eg, in Bangladesh or Sierra Leone) have also shown increased involvement in economic activities and financial literacy (Bangladesh) and reduced teenage pregnancy (Sierra Leone). A programme that has helped girls in sex work to find alternative livelihoods (in Uganda) has also led to the girls being less vulnerable to violence.
 - The issue is that most programmes are small-scale, led by non-governmental organisations, and hence challenging to take to scale/ensure sustainability, and are less likely to change systems at large/address persisting norms – why a systems approach is crucial.

- There need to be programmes/pathways in place to ensure the provision of skills needed for good livelihood opportunities – in parallel with the formal education system, as most girls are still leaving in primary school in many countries – including by linking different sectors.

Context matters: Exploring differential effects of the More Than Brides Alliance interventions to reduce child marriage

Dr. Andrea J. Melnikas, Population Council

- The programme supports interventions across the socio-ecological framework in India, Malawi, Mali and Niger, and the evaluation aimed to understand the impact of the programme as well as context-specific drivers.
- Some key results – different across countries – showed that eg, the level of child marriage decreased in India and that several educational indicators improved in Malawi. In Mali, there was an increase in mean age of marriage but no decline in child marriage prevalence.
 - Adolescent pregnancy did not decrease in Malawi, pointing to the fact that there are different drivers between pregnancy compared to school drop-out. In qualitative data collection, girls pointed to the fact that access to SRHR information and services was not the issue, but rather that they did not find a need to prevent pregnancy – this was seen as a viable life choice. This is why linking to other sectors – such as livelihood opportunities – is key.
 - The context in Mali needs to be understood further to explain why child marriage did not decrease: could eg, be the role of migration and dynamic communities in the country (how to engage these girls and families), and be linked to the general long engagement-periods in the country: what is captured as pre-marital pregnancy might be under an engagement where the girl is “de facto” married (living as if married).
 - In contexts where primary school enrolment is low, there might be a need to engage earlier with the girls to ensure they are reached with interventions before leaving education (and to prevent drop-out).
- The findings point to the importance of looking at the specific context, and shining a light on where there might be a need for further research to better understand the situation and the causal pathways for impact of programmes.

Q&A

- *Andrea J. Melnikas:* The evaluation cannot pick up the impact of the SRHR component specifically, but it was noted that the most significant change in terms of child marriage was seen in India, where most investments in this component had been done.
- *Pauline Rose:* Have not found clear examples of SRHR integration in school curriculums, a study in Uganda did not show the desired outcomes. There are existing non-governmental organisation-led programmes that most likely have a positive impact, but few government-led programmes (that can show results) and that can scale up.
- *William Rudgard:* In Ethiopia there have been efforts to move SRHR curriculum into schools, but important to still engage communities to ensure buy-in.

- *Satvika Chalasani*: Most child marriage programmes have some components of SRHR information/services – what is needed to ensure a systems approach is that the services are available across a large scale and that implementation is supported in a way that responds to outcomes set out for the programme (often challenges with making the services comprehensive and available to all).
- *Andrea J. Melnikas*: To enable programmes to go to scale we need the engagement of governments. Eg, the Balika programme in Bangladesh has buy-in from both communities and government-partners which will support the scale-up through existing systems.
- *Pauline Rose*: The study has shown the importance of having (female) champions within the political leadership, to enable impact in planning processes and to contribute to norms change within communities. Another approach in Ethiopia is to engage youth in programmes, which could be incorporated into the systems approach.
- *Silinganisiwe Dzumbunu*: We need to look further at the role of health workers in relation to changing social norms in the communities, to understand what impact they can have as part of a bigger structure.
- *Satvika Chalasani*: The Child Marriage Monitoring Mechanism – recently launched by UNICEF – will enable better data collection and analysis on systemic changes in various countries. This can have an impact on child marriage prevalence.

Research reports and briefs

- Silinganisiwe Dzumbunu, University of Cape Town and William Rudgard, University of Oxford – “Multiple impacts of Ethiopia’s Health Extension Programme on adolescent health and wellbeing: A quasi-experimental study 2002-2013” – POLICY BRIEF; journal article forthcoming.
- Professor Pauline Rose, REAL Centre, Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge – [Exploring the school to work transition for adolescent girls: Full report](#)
[Exploring the school to work transition for adolescent girls: Summary report](#)
[Summary blog: Adolescent women are being left behind in international efforts to end poverty](#)
- Dr. Andrea J. Melnikas, Program Manager & Associate Investigator, Population Council – [More than Brides Alliance endline evaluation report](#)

Additional resources

- The “[Promoting change in reproductive behavior of adolescents](#)” project (PRACHAR) from India shows some effects using Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs), both on age at marriage and contraceptive use among married couples.
- A recent review of [Rashtriya Kishore Swasthya Karyakram](#) (or RKSK), the National Adolescent Health Programme in India which uses ASHAs highlights concerning implementation challenges.
- [The Bangladeshi Association for Life Skills, Income, and Knowledge for Adolescents \(BALIKA\) project](#)

- [Transformative political leadership to promote 12 years of quality education for all girls: Policy brief](#)
- [Transformative political leadership to promote 12 years of quality education for all girls: Full paper](#)