

## The Child Marriage Research to Action Network (the CRANK)

### Research Meeting: The interlinkages between climate change and child marriage – Learning from emerging evidence and practice

10 April 2025

#### Key takeaways

- **Environmental crises worsen known drivers of child marriage, but the impacts depend on local socio-cultural contexts.** Pathways to child marriage – especially where there is little state social protection – include (direct and indirect) disruption to education, loss of livelihoods, displacement, increased threat of sexual violence, and local practices like bride price. Where dowry is predominant (like South Asia), environmental crisis leads to *reductions* in child marriage; where bride price is predominant (like West, Central, East and Southern Africa) crisis leads to *increases* in child marriage.
- **We need to take a lifecycle approach to understand, prevent and respond to climate change and child marriage beyond the moment of marriage or disaster.** Attempts to quantify the impact of climate-related events on child marriage are mixed, depending on time period and scale. Studies looking at short-term (proximal) effects of weather “shocks” show less impact than those looking at medium and longer-term (distal) and cumulative effects. Studies looking at national data found droughts did not have large-scale impacts on child marriage prevalence in most countries. Climate-induced displacement – before, during or after climate-related shocks – may mean the impacts are felt in another location, and at a later date. A lifecycle approach considers drivers and impacts from early warning systems to long-term consequences (e.g. health, education, labour market participation).
- **It is important to engage in drafting policy documents – including on climate, gender, education and social protection – at the national level to ensure they address the underlying drivers and long-term impacts of climate vulnerability and child marriage.** Engaging at this level is essential to deliver a comprehensive, gender-transformative response – from risk assessments to intervention design, implementation and measurement – that centres girls’ and women’s lived experiences. Interventions must be quantified for funding, including by multilateral climate financing mechanisms. Nationally Determined Contributions ([NDCs](#)) are due in September 2025.
- **Working in partnership at different levels is essential to deliver coordinated, cross-sectoral interventions that reduce the climate-related economic and social drivers of child marriage.** This means engaging relevant ministries – like those for gender, social protection, education and agriculture – and service providers at the local level to deliver initiatives like

#### Key figures:

- By 2025, climate change will cause at least **12.5 million girls** in 30 low- and lower-middle income countries to leave school.<sup>1</sup>
- Drought is linked to a **4% decrease** in child marriage in India.<sup>2</sup>
- Drought is linked with a **3% increase** in child marriage in West, Central, East and Southern Africa.<sup>3</sup>
- Droughts **did not change** national child marriage prevalence in most countries in a 61-country study.<sup>4</sup>

school feeding and smart agriculture in areas vulnerable to food insecurity and/or with low school attendance and female labour market participation.

- **Adolescent girl-centred community engagement – alongside support for education, livelihoods, and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) – can encourage parents to openly commit to their daughters’ education.** They can also increase girls’ and mothers’ decision-making power. Creative communication that uses storytelling formats and materials can help translate research into grassroots action, and bring community voices, experiences, negotiations and adaptation strategies into more nuanced research, policy and news stories.

### Let’s fill the research gaps!

We need:

- **Research from more countries and contexts beyond South Asia.**
- **Large-scale quantitative analyses** that link adolescent wellbeing (MICS/DHS data) with climate data.
- **Nuanced, community-led, qualitative research to show which groups are most affected, how and when.** This includes cumulative and life-long impacts of/on livelihoods, migration, poverty and child marriage.
- **To explore and compare broader environmental changes** beyond temperature and rainfall (e.g. river erosion, coastal flooding).
- **To consider the *relative weight of economic and social forces* – and individual and group consequences – in household decision-making.**
- **A comprehensive framework and theory of change specifying what about climate change matters – where, how and when does most impact on child marriage occur?**

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## Welcome

**Dr Faith Mwangi-Powell.**

- This meeting was organised on the sidelines of the 58th Session of the Commission on Population and Development. This topic relevant and important because:
  - Climate change is undoing progress on girls’ rights, and increasing risks to girls where, for example, schools close because of floods and/or girls cannot go to school because of food insecurity.
  - Check out Faith’s TED Talk on [Why climate change is code red for girls.](#)
- Coming from the Skoll Forum, the call is to step up and think about what we can accelerate. Today, the invitation is to think about how we can work together, bringing insights from our different contexts.

## Introduction

**Dr. Mohinder Watson**, Researcher and Main United Nations Geneva Representative, International Council of Women. Mohinder drew on a March 2022 [Expert Group Meeting](#) to explore evidence in the nexus between climate change and child marriage.

- In 2021, there was a lot of research on child marriage and a lot on climate change, but very little looking at the *links* between the two. Why?
  - The links are not immediately obvious (the impact is indirect).
  - We work in silos.
  - A lot is framed technologically/scientifically, downplaying the impact on peoples' lives and livelihoods, and especially on girls.
  - Though there is no conclusive evidence of the link yet, we know it happens in over 20 countries.
- Pathways that drive child marriage in the context of climate change (can be combined, rather than one single driver):
  - Families are pushed deeper into poverty (e.g. with crop failures) and resort to child marriage as a maladaptive coping strategy, reducing family size and one less mouth to feed.
  - Displacement increases security concerns (e.g. fear of sexual violence), and child marriage is (mistakenly) seen as a way to mitigate risks and protect family honour.
  - Girls are married for safety reasons (e.g. in flood-prone areas, they may be married to move to safer locations away from climate risks).
  - Disruption to girls' education, as schools are closed, damaged, destroyed or used as temporary shelters.
  - Gender discrimination becomes intensified with increasing poverty. In the absence of social protection, boys are expected to provide for their parents in old age, so their education is prioritised; girls are expected to marry and move away to a new home (where they will also have caring duties).
  - Marriage transactions like bride price and dowry. Bride price can generate income for the girls' family. Dowry payments to groom's family may be reduced/removed in exchange for early(er) marriage of girls.

### Recommendations

1. Implement and enforce laws/policies – set 18 as the minimum age of marriage.
2. Build climate-resilient education systems, prioritising girls' education (including during crisis).
3. Promote gender-responsive climate adaptation/mitigation strategies – empower girls and women to become leaders/decision-makers, address gender-based violence (GBV) and integrate child protection policies in all programming from the start.
4. Invest in climate resilient communities – early warning systems, water/resource management, crop diversification, alternative livelihoods and social protection systems as a safety net to prevent families resorting to child marriage.

5. Address social norms – accelerate and “localise” Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), working in communities, and engaging boys and men, religious leaders, village chiefs/elders, teachers and health care workers.
6. Adopt and integrate children’s rights and human rights-based approaches – promote/protect rights of girls and women in all their diversity.
7. Looking ahead – we need more research to build a robust body of independent and impartial evidence to inform policymaking and programming:
  - We need statistics on how many girls are affected and where.
  - “Localise SDGs”, working with communities to co-create sustainable solutions which also advance local development (not just a short-term intervention).

## Panel 1: Learning from emerging evidence – Implications for research, practice and policy

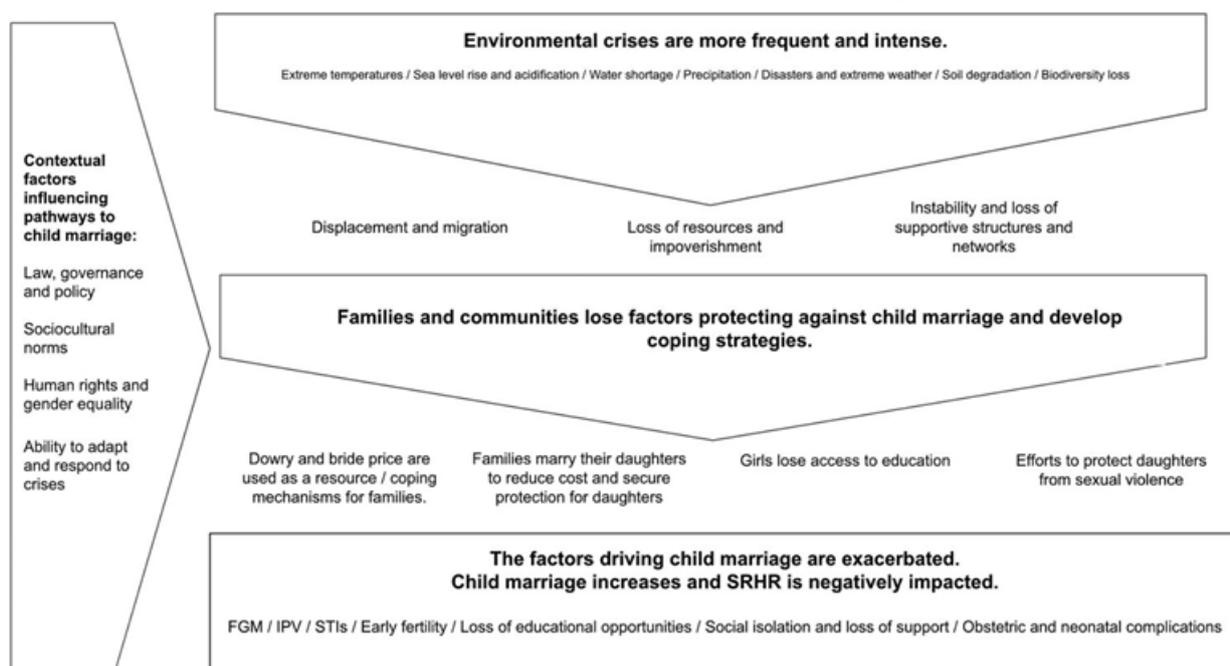
### Climate change and child marriage: The global evidence.

Presented by **Chiagozie Udeh**, Programme Specialist Climate Adaptation and Innovation, UNFPA ESARO, with reference to [What is the current evidence for the relationship between the climate and environmental crises and child marriage?](#) and a UNFPA evidence brief on [child marriage and environmental crisis](#).

Evidence from the scoping review showed: 1. Environmental crises worsen known drivers of child marriage, and 2. Local socio-cultural contexts (bride price, dowry practices) shape how these factors affect child marriage.

#### 1. Environmental crises worsen known drivers of child marriage

- A conceptual framework showing the intersection of climate change and child marriage:



- Amid all the data, it is important to highlight that *people* are at the centre:
 

*“The floods took all our harvest [...] I tried to negotiate to tell my parents [...] that I didn’t want to get married, but they told me that I had to because that would mean one less mouth at the table.”* Chamberlain et al., 2017, Malawi
- Key pathways through which environmental crisis drives child marriage
  - Dowry and bride price – prevalence of dowry/bride price practices seems to contribute to how economic shocks can affect decisions around marriage.
  - Sexual violence and female genital mutilation (FGM) – climate change can lead to a rise in sexual violence, with child marriage seen as a way to protect children and the family’s reputation. Risk of more girls undergoing FGM to get married for a better bride price.
  - Loss of livelihoods – families forced to take coping strategies after loss of assets and income after droughts, floods, etc.
  - Education disruption – direct disruption (e.g. damage to school infrastructure) and indirectly (e.g. worsening poverty).
  - Displacement – child marriage increases among displaced populations and in anticipation of environmental disaster.
- Some data from the review:
  - By 2025, climate change will cause at least 12.5 million girls in 30 low- and lower-middle income countries to leave school. Twenty-two of those countries are in Africa (Malala Fund, 2022).
  - 1.5 million girls in Malawi are at risk of child marriage due to extreme weather events caused by climate change (Chamberlain, 2017).

## 2. Local socio-cultural contexts like bride price/dowry shape how these factors affect child marriage

- South Asia
  - Dowry is predominant.
  - There are increases and decreases in child marriage depending on context-specific practices.
  - Dowry practices linked to reductions in child marriage after environmental crises.
  - Drought is linked to a **4% decrease** of child marriage in India.
- Sub-Saharan Africa
  - Bride price is predominant, leading to increases in child marriage and FGM. Some countries are exceptions (e.g. Eritrea) due to predominance of dowry practices.
  - We see smaller dowries after environmental crisis, due to the desire to protect daughters (e.g. moving away from risk area). But in some cases, younger girls command higher bride prices.
  - Drought is associated with a **3% increase** in child marriage.

- East and Southern Africa
  - Bride price and dowry at play.
  - Increase in child marriage and FGM following climate disaster.
  - Interrupted SRHR services and high adolescent pregnancy.
  - Climate-induced infectious diseases, and resorting to child marriage as a coping mechanism.

### 3. Limitations

- Most evidence is correlational and not causal.
- Many studies use a single meteorological variable (e.g. rainfall) as a proxy for local climate complexity.
- Several studies used cohorts married decades ago, raising concerns about recall bias.
- Much of literature lacks formal peer review.
- Majority of evidence is from South Asia, so may not be generalisable to other cultural contexts.

### 4. Recommendations

- National climate policy solutions
  - Ensure the intersection between climate change and child marriage is integrated into key national policy documents (and the climate space). There is an opportunity window now, as the third generation of the Nationally Determined Contributions ([NDCs 3.0](#), to be submitted before September 2025) are being developed or updated by all countries. The National Adaptation Plans ([NAPs](#)) and climate change Gender Action Plan ([ccGAP](#)) are going through the same process.
  - In addressing this intersection, we need to capture impact, vulnerability, proposed interventions, budget and indicators for measurement. These are critical elements to these documents, showing if/that governments are serious about addressing this intersection, and are funding action.
- Strengthen research and data, especially at the national level
  - Close the gap on limited research in the countries where we work, documenting what is happening at the local/community level to inform policy.
  - Integrate vulnerability assessments on child marriage and climate change into this work.
  - Empower locally-led research, ensuring people from communities have the capacity and skills to do the research and unpack the evidence.
  - Future work should investigate a wider variety of ecological and environmental changes beyond drought, heatwave and flooding.
- Strengthen protection systems and mainstream this into financing mechanisms of climate change globally (e.g. [Green Climate Fund](#), [Adaptation Fund](#)).
  - Streamlined protection systems are critical to ensure vulnerable groups in these contexts are protected.

- Early warning systems found to be protective against child marriage post-disasters in Indonesia – this merits further exploration.
  - Programming and project interventions
    - Ensure programmes are gender-transformative and account for the impact of environmental crisis on child marriage.
    - Ensure they are quantified, so they can be funded by multilateral financing mechanisms on climate.
5. Resources: Infographics, Q&A, advocacy and recommendations produced by [UNFPA](#).

### **Proximate, distal and life course effects on climate change on child marriage: Evidence from Bangladesh.**

Presented by **Sajeda Amin**, Senior Research Advisor, Sajida Foundation. Sajeda drew from [Climate change and child marriage: The evidence from Bangladesh](#) and a forthcoming scoping study commissioned by the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage and UNFPA-Dhaka.

- Some of the evidence is inconclusive. Part of the issue is how we frame the topic and then look for the associations we expect.
- Climate change has proximate factors, distal factors and life-course effects on child marriage – we need to pay more attention to these in our framing.

### Conclusions from the recent scoping review (on climate change and child marriage in Bangladesh):

1. Regional variation in climate change:
  - Coastal communities are vulnerable to various things related to sea level rise (e.g. salinity, cyclones).
  - Northern and central districts are affected by flooding, river erosion and drought.
2. Regional variation in child marriage:
  - High overall child marriage prevalence: about 50% of women (aged 20-24) were married by age 18 (latest DHS).
  - Higher prevalence in western region and coastal belt. Sajeda worked on the BALIKA project [analysis](#) over a 100-village area in south-western districts of Bangladesh, where she observed enormous variations in patterns of climate change.

Review of 15 relevant articles focused on Bangladesh published 2014-24 and covering: climate change, child marriage, original primary or secondary analysis (little grey literature), equal amounts of quantitative and qualitative evidence.

- In previous studies, climate change was described as “shocks” or “weather crisis” – a framing that is more proximal.
- In the newer 15 articles, climate is thought of as a cumulative change (e.g. through river erosion, coastal flooding, salinity rise).

- Bangladesh covers a small area, but these studies covered a wide variety of climate phenomena, from extreme rainfall to drought, extreme heatwaves, salinity, waterlogging, river erosion, cyclones, flooding – the range of climate-related changes.

Summary of the scoping review: impact of climate change on child marriage:

- Most qualitative studies confirmed that climate change **exacerbates** existing factors that increase child marriage: diminished livelihood options, increased insecurity (e.g. sexual violence, perceived risks to daughters), reduced marriageability (e.g. dowry, bride price).
- Attempts to quantify the impact of child marriage show mixed results:
  - Only about half of the quantitative studies looking at the short-term (**proximate**) effects of weather “shocks” show rainfall, heat, floods to have a statistically significant effect.
  - Strongest impacts are observed in areas and studies that explore medium and longer-term (**distal**) and cumulative effects of coastal erosion, drought and salinity. This is the main contribution of this study.
  - Quantitative and qualitative studies describing the pathways also emphasise these distal effects.

Summary of WHO review: what works for child marriage (done to inform the revised [guidelines](#) on adolescent girls’ health):

- The strongest evidence is from skill-building programmes for livelihoods and education – this is a very strong recommendation for a strategy that works to prevent child marriage.
- Relatively little and mixed effects of legal or norm change approaches – the WHO still recommends these as promising practice. The evidence does not exist because these factors happen at a very broad level, so are difficult to implement randomised controlled trials (RCTs) on.
- Mixed evidence on standalone approaches to promote voice, choice and agency – it is important to think about empowerment programmes as “add on” elements to other approaches that work (e.g. education, livelihoods).

Gaps:

- We need a comprehensive framework and theory of change specifying what about climate change matters. Within this, we need to think about:
  - *Where* is it most consequential? Many studies highlight the importance of displacement – work on cyclones showed lower child marriage in directly-hit areas, suggesting people are adapting by moving away. We need to think about the “where” of impact in more creative terms.
  - *How* does it affect child marriage? Think about transactions (e.g. bride price/dowry), and other factors that affect marriageability.
  - *When* does the most impact occur? Does it happen immediately after an event, or further down the line? There is evidence from Mexico showing displacement has a pattern of behaviour that takes place after an event – looking for the impact of shocks in the immediate aftermath may not be as useful as looking at effects further down the line.

- Qualitative studies can suggest pathways that can be elaborated on further, considering the effects on livelihoods, migration and poverty – these need to be more clearly articulated.
- Quantitative exploration:
  - Need more comparative spatial analysis of different types of climate impact.
  - Temporal impacts.
  - Lifecycle – because child marriage occurs at a certain life stage, the focus stays there. Now we need to look at lifecycle effects further down the line – e.g. higher non-communicable diseases (NCD) in mid- and late-life, longer-term labour market effects.

#### Takeaways:

- Future directions to address evidence gaps:
  - Promote secondary and large-scale analyses linking MICS/DHS with climate data.
  - More mixed-methods analysis: in situ and broader context.
  - Look for associations near and far.
  - Lifecycle approaches to understand implications of child marriage.
  - Do not be limited by child marriage research on “what works”.
- Explore pathways of policy relevance and intersectionality (who suffers the most):
  - Greater attention to the later consequences of previous climate change impacts (sequelae), like migration and urbanisation.
  - Explore proximate and distal effects: longer-term impact of climate change; later life implications of child marriage, like NCD (Mehinder: and mental health impacts).

#### **The social consequences of climate change: A qualitative analysis of early girl child marriage as an informal adaptation strategy among rural communities in Northern Ghana.**

Presented by **Loretta Adowaa Asare**, Student of Bonn University Applied Social Sciences, drawing from [\*The social consequences of climate change: A qualitative analysis of early girl child marriage as an informal adaptation strategy among rural communities in Northern Ghana\*](#).

#### Setting the scene

- Location: Ghana, West Africa.
- Occupation: Agriculture plays a crucial role in the economy, engaging 40% of the population.
- Climate change: Vivid impact on agricultural production.
- Situation in northern Ghana: Bongo District
  - Normally very dry, little rainfall and high temperature variation causing climate-related events that impact livelihood and food security.
  - Farmers marry daughters early to offset climate-related financial burdens.
  - Highest prevalence of girl child marriage in the country at 39.2%.

- One of the most food insecure districts in the upper east region (20% of households are food insecure).
- Where there is little state presence/formal social protection, child marriage is seen as a way to safeguard girls' futures in the event of climate disaster.

#### What this study looked at

- Objective and scope: To investigate the impacts of climate change on early girl-child marriage in Bongo, Ghana.
- Research question: What is the link between climate change effects and early girl-child marriage as an adaptive social protection mechanism?
- Methodology: Qualitative data, with interviews, purposive sampling, focus group discussions, observation.

#### Findings

- Early girl-child marriage (through bride price) is seen as a way to keep boys in school.  
*“And again, if you have boys and girls who have completed JSS [Junior Secondary School] and there is no money to continue, you can give the girl to marry and take the cows and the things and sell them and use the money to take care of the boys in school.”*
- Bride price is used to establish an alternative livelihood to support the family in the event of climate disaster.  
*“[...] bride price becomes a very efficient capital that enables a family to venture into a small new business to help sustain the family and escape poverty [...]”*
- Child marriage is seen as a protection mechanism with group (family) – not individual – consequences.
- The girl child is seen as a liability or burden until she is married – seen as having a lot of needs and putting a lot of responsibility on the family.
- Early marriage is seen as a way to protect the girl child from poverty and unwanted pregnancy.  
*“[We] believe that marrying our daughters off will help them since their husbands will now take full responsibility and help them through school even after childbirth”*

#### Conclusion and recommendations

- Ministry of Gender and Social Protection (responsible for any issue with girls) – partner with social workers at the local level to implement preventive measures.
- Social workers – advocate and work with Ministry of Agriculture on innovative and sustainable practices that:
  - Support girls to be seen as a productive/contributing member of the family, rather than a burden, e.g. smart agricultural practices.
  - Reduce climate-related economic drivers of child marriage.
- Data collection – most studies measure household wealth *after* girls are married. Need to look at poverty as a *driver* of child marriage.

## The effect of extreme weather events on the frequency of child marriage.

Presented by **Alissa Koski**, social epidemiologist and Associate Professor at McGill University in Montreal, who drew on their recent systematic review of the evidence: [The effect of extreme weather events on the frequency of child marriage](#).

- The review builds on the work summarised by Chiagozie above, and:
  - Includes more recent work published between 2021 and 2023.
  - Evaluates *how well* existing quantitative research demonstrates that these weather events *cause* changes in the probability of marrying as a child (rather than only the *breadth* of research). Correlation is not necessarily causation! We wanted to know how sure we can be that the results of these studies reflect causal relationships, and not (non-causal) correlations.

### What we learnt:

1. Most research has been conducted in a small number of countries:
  - Since the drivers of child marriage differ across societies, it will be important to consider a broader range of settings going forward.
2. Prior quantitative studies are at high risk of bias – it cannot disentangle correlation from causation.
  - Stronger research designs are needed.

→ Our research team is already acting on these recommendations

### What effect do droughts have on national rates of child marriage in 61 countries?

Responding to the first recommendation, we looked at a broader range of geographic settings, because social circumstances affect the drivers and consequences of these events. We found that:

- Droughts did not change national rates of child marriage in most countries.
- There were a few exceptions: in a handful of countries child marriage increased slightly (e.g. Uganda and Mali), but decreased in others.

### Implications for research and policy

1. It is not clear that extreme weather events necessarily lead to increases in child marriage on a **large scale**.
  - Broad policies, like national strategies may not need to change – at least not yet. That said, climate change is expected to increase the frequency and intensity of these events.
2. That does not mean that these weather events are not affecting child marriage patterns amongst smaller groups – national-level statistics can hide variations among smaller groups within countries, and may not be at odds with local-level qualitative studies (like that presented by Loretta).
  - Studying whether smaller groups within countries are more affected may warrant **targeted practice approaches**.
  - We need to consider the **relative weight** of economic and social forces in decision-making around child marriage. There are multiple mechanisms through which climate change could impact on child marriage prevalence, but we rarely talk about which factor has the most

weight in a family's decision-making process. Perhaps some of these economic shocks (as referred to by Sajeda) are not the major factor, maybe social forces are playing a greater role in some sessions.

## Q&A

**With reference to the findings on increased child marriage and reduced marriageability – does this refer to marriage later in life in the event that a girl avoids/leaves a child marriage (“is rescued”)?**

**Sajeda:** Very strong evidence from Bangladesh shows the idea that enforcement or “rescuing” is not something that exists at a large scale to be able to comment on it. My comment was more about marriage as a general consideration by households and communities.

**What time period did the studies Alissa reviewed look at the extreme weather events for – how long after the events were the effects measured?**

**Alissa:** We looked at data from 1980 to 2018, combining DHS and MICS with climate data. The author list includes social epidemiologists and climate scientists. We looked at the effects up to three years after the drought – no lifecycle effects, which would be a lot to ask of quantitative data. To the extent that these events are acting as shocks, we would expect to see impacts within a few years.

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## Panel 2: Learning from promising practices and strategies

### Interlinkages of child marriage and food insecurity.

Presented by **Ramatoulaye Dieye**, Regional Gender Advisor, World Food Programme. Ramatoulaye drew on this technical brief: [Interlinkages of child marriage and food insecurity](#)

- West and Central Africa – region prone to polycrisis, with high levels of food insecurity and child marriage (e.g. 76% prevalence in Niger).
- Integrated programming: example from the Breaking the Barriers to Girls' Education (BBGE) programme in Chad and Niger (WFP/UNICEF/UNFPA). Each organisation brought their own strengths to address the complex drivers of child marriage.
  - Centred around (adolescent) girls, with education as an entry point – particular focus on secondary schools, as the moment when girls are at most risk of early school leaving, adolescent pregnancy and child marriage.
  - School feeding, take-home rations and scholarships – encouragement for children (and especially girls) to stay in school, and for new children to enrol.
  - WASH – providing facilities, including separate toilets and water supply.
  - SRHR – including education and provision of dignity kits.
  - Livelihood support – particularly for mothers to begin their own income-generating activities. This was part of a community engagement approach, so all the pieces around a school are

brought together, parents are also responsible and committed to education, and accountable to bring the message around child marriage and girls' education.

○ Results:

- Increased enrolment of girls
- Delay in child marriage
- Increased livelihood opportunities for women
- Increased participation of women in decision-making
- In Chad: the country committed to increase school canteen coverage by 15% in provinces that are highly vulnerable to food and nutrition insecurity and have low attendance and school results.

● Call to action

1. Research agenda – need to invest in researching more, not only on interlinkages but also on programmes, and how they affect the reduction of these issues, e.g. food insecurity, child marriage and social protection interventions.
2. Data and monitoring – integrate variables related to child marriage in food insecurity data and understand the correlation with factors like food security, health and demographics.
3. Multisectoral approaches – this is complex, especially in humanitarian situations; it is important to coordinate interventions to bring partners together to have a holistic approach to addressing this issue.
4. Comprehensive policy frameworks – address underlying drivers of food insecurity and integrate gender considerations in climate change policies; education and gender policies need to consider how girls specifically are affected by climate change.

### Climate Brides.

Presented by **Reetika Revathy Subramanian**, Creator, Climate Brides. Check out the Climate Brides [map](#), which highlights how climate risks in South Asia intensify the structural drivers of child marriage.

- Child marriage is not static – its drivers and forms are changing in new circumstances.
- Climate Brides is a research and storytelling platform that explores the intersection of child marriage and climate change in South Asia.
- Built on [Gate-cane: \(Un\)tying the knots between climate, cane and early marriage in rural India](#) – a PhD study of cyclical drought and extractive agricultural practices in the sugar cane belt, and how they were shaping girls' lives and deepening child marriage risks.
- The study was based on over 150 intergenerational interviews, trying to understand how marriage decisions were changing, how labour contractors were working as marriage brokers, etc.
- Two key aspects stood out:
  1. Limited literature on the impact of climate change on adolescent girls and young women. Despite girls playing a crucial role in household labour and supporting survival efforts, they are invisible in climate adaptation plans, news reports, academic scholarship.

2. Conversations around child marriage were largely age-centred, focusing on girls as victims and parents as perpetrators, only treating it as a harmful practice rather than situating it within a wider system of economic inequality, caste, gender injustice and climate vulnerability.
- Climate Brides was formed to shift this lens, to fill gaps between research, lived experience and public dialogue. The aim is to make research more accessible and usable, beyond journals and conferences into public space and discourse.
  - Climate Brides launched as an open-access multimedia repository in 2021. It documents how climate change is deepening the drivers of child marriage in South Asia, amplifies voices from the region through interview podcasts, impactful infographics, film and curated reading lists.
  - Three core principles:
    1. Disrupt simplistic climate stories – going beyond idea that climate change is gender neutral.
    2. Centre power, place and people – especially the experiences being documented.
    3. Grounded and creative communication – using storytelling formats from podcasts to infographics and materials that grassroots organisations can use, so research can travel further.
  - Climate Brides podcasts with academics, journalists, activists, practitioners in and from South Asia – to understand how they understand the practice, and how these narratives can be broken down. Ask about existing vocabulary on climate change, existing marriage practices, how they exist and what the connections are. Discussing what child marriage is and how the external factors are pushing marriages and creating new forms of bridal payments, to try and understand the complexities and nuances.
  - Climate Brides map – one of the ways to bring information to broader audiences in more languages. The maps show the key drivers of child marriage and how climate change acts as a “threat multiplier”. If there is another language you would like, write to [climatebrides@outlook.com](mailto:climatebrides@outlook.com).
  - We need more nuanced, intersectional research that is also accessible – different voices, perspectives, languages and formats.
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## Q&A and discussion

### **How do climate change-induced stresses (like food insecurity or displacement) intersect with girls’ exclusion from ICT and how does this affect child marriage risks?**

**Chiagozie:** Climate change often leads to loss of livelihoods, particularly where communities rely on rain-fed agriculture that is very climate sensitive. Where we work, most agricultural work is done by women, and climate change has direct impact on how much they can support the education of their children, or access ICT components.

### **Do we need to look not only at how child marriage is increasing or decreasing in the context of climate change, but also at if/how the practice is changing?**

**Loretta:** Northern Ghana is very traditional, and marriage is important for girls, even those who go to school – if you do not marry you are seen as not progressing. Practices have not changed much, it is a thing people are not talking about, particularly around climate change and the drivers of child marriage.

**Sajeda:** It is important to not only look at timing but also other aspects of marriage in context.

**Mohinder:** Perhaps we will see child marriage emerging where it was not prevalent before, because of climate crisis.

### **Can gender mainstreaming in climate smart agriculture, empowering women, be helpful in addressing child marriage risk?**

**Loretta:** In northern Ghana, power – and decision-making around child marriage – mostly lies with older men. It is good to empower older women, but securing livelihoods (for fathers) may help them to make different decisions around marriage when faced with climate disaster.

### **Is there evidence around child marriage and climate change in the Dalit communities in Bangladesh?**

**Sajeda:** The literature is very focused on age of marriage and not marriage practices, marriageability and the broader context of marriage. Child marriage is studied in the broader population without enough differentiation by caste or other socio-economic practice. But you can extrapolate – there is attention paid to wealth-related differences that can be used.

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## **Some key takeaways form the speakers**

**Ramatoulaye:** We need more research to better understand the links between child marriage and climate change. Child marriage is a complex issue, and then you add climate change and its effects on food security, poverty, economic security, and a context of gender inequality. It is important to deepen research, and refine the evidence, and to use the results in adolescent girl programming.

**Reetika:** In this growing body of evidence, we need to avoid simplistic narratives around climate change and child marriage – the nuance is important. We need to make visible the voices/experiences/negotiations/adaptation strategies from communities.

**Chiagozie:** It is important to engage with critical policy documents at the national level, like the ongoing NDCs3. Engage in the drafting process to ensure these intersections are captured, as these documents are the basis for proposed interventions, budgets, indicators and measurement.

**Sajeda:** I am glad that climate change is not just seen as a shock – climate crisis is not temporally bound. I hope that the same will happen with regards child marriage – its impacts are not limited to adolescence or that period right after marriage, but also has life-long effects.

**Loretta:** I hope to move from policies to implementation. From my fieldwork, you can see that participants were happy to share but were also looking for solutions to help themselves.

**Alissa:** I appreciate the integration of quantitative and qualitative research in our panel – information on broad and nuanced scales is needed, we need numbers to talk about scales of a problem, but we also need qualitatively-driven information on how this is happening and affecting people.

**Mohinder:** We have heard the importance of lived realities, context, engaging in policy conversations to generate the finance needed for research, we need to understand the magnitude of the issue (through large-scale quantitative studies) and the nuances of people's lived realities, not to oversimplify and extrapolate, looking beyond the moment of marriage or disaster to take a lifecycle approach. We looked at the importance of this on girls' health.

**Closing remarks, José Roberto, UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage**

- There was not enough research on child marriage and climate change, but there is progress and more research happening.
- We cannot generalise, but there are clear pathways through which climate change impacts child marriage and adolescent girls' lives.
- It is also important to find that evidence is inconclusive – we need to look at context and how to respond to it.
- The value of girls – if we want to move forwards with policy, financing, programming, we need to look at how gender and power interact with compounding crises.
- Moving from the available evidence to programming and policies – we tend to work in silos, including financing, but this is a challenging moment and we need to come together.
- Celebrate progress – we have more evidence than a decade ago, but more – and more diverse research – is needed, from other countries on a larger scale. We need to continue to invest in research, look at how the available evidence can inform programming beyond the child marriage movement – including humanitarian and climate actors.
- How to continue breaking silos and come together in solidarity, while our resources are squeezed. We need to work with policymakers on climate change, connecting our interventions with others working on food security, etc.
- The CRANK is working on co-creating a research agenda looking to fill these gaps.
- [Sign up](#) to the CRANK to keep updated and involved in what is coming this year.

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## Resources shared

- [Climate Brides](#) research and storytelling platform, including:
  - A [map](#) of climate change and child marriage risks in South Asia, intended for educators, researchers and advocates.
  - A [podcast](#) series.
  - A curated [reading list](#).
- Updated WHO [guidelines](#) to prevent adolescent pregnancies and improve girls' health, also forthcoming in Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian and Spanish.
- A [selection of synthesis resources](#) produced alongside the UNFPA/Queen Mary University scoping review, including:
  - Technical brief: [Child marriage and environmental crisis](#).

- Advocacy brief: [The impact of climate change on SRHR](#).
- FAQ: [UNFPA and the climate crisis](#).
- Recommendations: [SRHR and climate action](#).
- Infographic: [Climate change and gender-based violence](#).
- Infographic: [Bodily autonomy and access to family planning are essential for responding to climate change](#).
- Infographic: [Responding to climate change requires health systems strengthening](#).
- Infographic: [The negative impact of climate change on maternal health](#).
- Infographic: [Environmental crises exacerbate some drivers of child marriage](#).
- Animated video: [The impact of the climate crisis on sexual and reproductive health and rights](#).
- Animated video for adolescents: [Climate change's impact on sexual and reproductive health and rights](#).
- Faith Mwangi-Powell's TED talk: [Why climate change is code red for girls](#).
- A [selection of resources](#) focused on climate change and harmful practices in Africa, compiled by UNICEF.
- Academic research/evidence reviews:
  - Action on Child, Early and Forced Marriage, 2024, [CEDAW informal Briefing: The nexus between climate change and child marriage](#), prepared by Watson, M. Also available in [French](#) and [Spanish](#).
  - Action on Child, Early and Forced Marriage, 2023, [Proceedings of an international expert group meeting exploring the nexus between climate change and child marriage: What does the evidence tell us?](#), prepared by Watson, M. and Mael, J.
  - Ainul, S., Saha, J., Hossain, I. and Amin, S, 2022, [Climate change and child marriage: The evidence from Bangladesh](#).
  - Asare, A. L., and Forkuor, J. B., 2024, [The social consequences of climate change: A qualitative analysis of early girl child marriage as an informal adaptation strategy among rural communities in Northern Ghana](#).
  - Palmer, A., Danioko, A. and Koski, A., 2024, [The effect of extreme weather events on the frequency of child marriage](#).
  - Pope, D. H., McMullen, H., Baschieri, A., Philipose, A., Udeh, C., Diallo, J. and McCoy, D., 2023, [What is the current evidence for the relationship between the climate and environmental crises and child marriage?](#)
  - Subramanian, R. R., 2024, [Gate-cane: \(Un\)tying the knots between climate, cane and early marriage in rural India](#).
  - UNFPA and WFP, 2024, [Technical brief: Interlinkages of child marriage and food insecurity](#).

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- <sup>2</sup> Corno, L., Hidebrandt, N., and Voena, A., 2020, Age of marriage, weather shocks, and the direction of marriage payments, *Econometrica*, 88(3); referenced in Pope, D. H., McMullen, H., Baschieri, A., Philipose, A., Udeh, C., Diallo, J. and McCoy, D., 2021, [\*What is the current evidence for the relationship between the climate and environmental crises and child marriage? A scoping review\*](#), *Global Public Health*, 18(1).
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