Taking action to address child marriage:

the role of different sectors

An overview

GIRLS NOT BRIDES | The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage

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Introduction

Child marriage has rapidly gained international attention over the last decade with donors increasingly recognising the importance of child marriage and its links to a range of development priorities from economic development and poverty alleviation to health, human rights, and social justice. The body of evidence regarding child marriage prevention and response is now deep and wide, and it clearly shows that effective strategies require not only dedicated efforts to address child marriage, but also cross-sectoral cooperation and integration. Preventing child marriage, as well as responding to the needs of adolescents who are already married, necessitates concerted action from donors, implementers, researchers, and advocates in a variety of sectors.

This Overview and the accompanying sector-specific briefs provide a short, accessible introduction to incorporating and measuring child marriage prevention and response throughout the programme lifecycle within a variety of sectoral and cross-sectoral programming. These resources are intended for those working in and across education; global health; gender-based violence; youth programming; democracy, human rights, and governance; economic growth and workforce development; conflict and humanitarian crisis; agriculture, energy and the environment; and food security and nutrition. Integrating child marriage prevention and response across many sectors and into existing efforts can both accelerate efforts to end this harmful practice and better meet the needs of girls and women, while contributing to the achievement of existing sector-specific goals.

> *The evidence shows that effective strategies to address child marriage require cross-sectoral cooperation and integration*

These resources are adapted from the comprehensive Child, Early, and Forced Marriage Resource Guide, released in 2015 by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and written by ICRW and Banyan Global. With support from *Girls Not Brides*, ICRW has developed this Overview and a set of sector-focused briefs to help donors and practitioners. These resources will be of particular use during the needs assessment and programme design stages—when child marriage integration should ideally begin—to facilitate effective programme implementation and achieve maximum impact. This Overview provides a brief background on child marriage, broadly applicable guidance for child marriage integration throughout the programme cycle, information about monitoring and evaluation, and key resources for further reading. The briefs outline the ways in which child

Sector specific briefs:

◗ Health
◗ Education
◗ Democracy, human rights, and governance
◗ Economic growth and workforce development
◗ Conflict and humanitarian crisis
◗ Food security and nutrition
◗ Agriculture, energy, and the environment
◗ Gender-based violence
◗ Youth

marriage is relevant to programmes across diverse sectors and highlight promising strategies and examples being used around the world to address child marriage. They also provide recommendations for how these strategies can be adapted to end child marriage worldwide. These resources will be useful to funding organisations deciding where to allocate resources as well as programme designers and implementers who wish to increase their focus on child marriage. They will also be useful for advocates calling for strategies to integrate child marriage across sectors. For more detailed information and complete references, please visit: https://www.usaid.gov/documents/1865/child-early-and-forced-marriage-resource-guide.

What is child marriage and what is the impact?

Child marriage (also called early marriage) is defined as a formal or informal union where one or both parties are under the age of 18. Child marriage disproportionately affects girls more than boys. According to UNICEF, 720 million women alive today were married as children, as compared to 156 million men. Some fifteen million girls are married each year worldwide, and across the developing world, one in three girls is married before the age of 18, and one in nine girls before age 15. A confluence of social, economic, cultural, and political factors perpetuate this harmful practice across a range of countries and cultural and religious contexts. Situated at the nexus of these factors are unequal gender norms and power relations that devalue and restrict women and girls.

Child marriage is a violation of human rights, as well as a barrier to social and economic development.

While child marriage occurs in virtually every country, the prevalence varies considerably across and within regions and countries, and it is most widespread in developing countries. The most commonly used and globally comparable measure of the prevalence of child marriage is the *proportion of women 20 to 24 who report being married (or living with a man as if married) by the age of 18*. According to this measure, 51 countries have a prevalence rate of 25 percent or greater—the threshold typically used to define a "high burden." In countries like Niger, Chad, and Bangladesh, more than two-thirds of women aged 20-24 were married as children, and country-level prevalence rates may mask higher prevalence rates in sub-national regions. High prevalence rates combined with large youth populations situate India, Nigeria, and Brazil among the countries with the highest number of child brides globally. Although child marriage rates are decreasing in most countries, the declines are uneven, and if current trends in child marriage prevalence and population growth continue, 150 million girls will be married by their 18th birthday over the next decade.

Child marriage is a violation of human rights, as well as a barrier to social and economic development. In whatever form it takes, child marriage represents a detrimental life-course shift during the crucial period of adolescence. It negatively affects the health of girls and their future families by contributing to early sexual activity, pregnancy, and childbearing; limiting girls' chances of staying in school and gaining information, skills, and support networks; increasing their exposure to physical, sexual, and emotional violence; and restricting their agency, mobility, and decision-making power. While child marriage has consequences at the individual and household levels, it can also impact communities' and countries' social, economic, and political development.

Integrating child marriage prevention and response in programmes across sectors

Child marriage is a cross-cutting issue; it harms all aspects of a girl's life throughout her lifetime, undermining the development of her family, community, and nation. Efforts within just one sector cannot solve this global phenomenon. It demands attention from multiple sectors and must include not only girls, but also boys, families, communities, and other stakeholders. Therefore, prevention and response services need to be integrated across various sectors to create a comprehensive strategy for reducing and mitigating the effects of child marriage, as well as meeting the needs of married adolescents. There is also increased recognition that to accelerate the pace of child marriage reduction globally, funders and implementers must move beyond small-scale programming and begin integrating child marriage prevention and response into broader structural efforts. As addressing child marriage may not be the core responsibility of any one sector, funders and implementers from all sectors will need to seek opportunities to leverage each other's funding and resources, developing a holistic approach to child marriage prevention and response.

Recently, attention and investment have focused increasingly on interlinked programmes that aim to prevent and respond to child marriage. In fact, the most successful programmes often incorporate efforts at the individual, family/community, and institutional levels. *Girls Not Brides* recently developed a Child Marriage Theory of Change that lays out the critical pathways and strategies needed at multiple levels to end child marriage and support married

solutions to end child marriage: summary of the evidence

Empower girls with information, skills, and support networks

Educate and rally parents and community members

Enhance girls' access to a high-quality education

Provide economic support and incentives to girls and their families

Encourage supportive laws and policies

ICRW. 2013. Solutions to end child marriage: summary of the evidence.

girls. The appropriate entry points and levels on which to focus can depend on the cultural context of a geographic location. Yet based on lessons learned from previous programming, evidence exists to point us toward some of the most promising strategies to end child marriage (see graphic). Some effective programmes directly equip both married and unmarried girls with skills and information, increase their access to resources, and build their agency, while others shift broader social norms related to marriage formation and gender equality, including through working with parents, community leaders, and boys. Financial incentives to keep girls in school and/or employed can also provide powerful alternatives to marriage. The impact of these strategies on child marriage often depends on the specific context, the implementing organisation's capacity, the programme's scope and reach, and the enabling environment.

When identifying methods for integrating child marriage prevention and response into existing programmes, efforts should be made to create scalable and sustainable approaches and to collect costing data to determine the most cost effective strategies. In resource-constrained environments, implementers can utilise cross-sectoral funds, leverage funding from a variety of donors, and engage government and private sector partners. Finally, given that child marriage programmes target a particularly vulnerable population, it is of critical importance that practitioners integrate child protection/safeguarding and/or do-no-harm considerations.

Many programmes are uniquely positioned to directly address risk factors for child marriage, as well as to incorporate child marriage prevention and response into existing programmes. Many development programmes are also already engaging key stakeholders who can play significant roles in child marriage prevention and response, such as women and girls, men and boys, community and religious leaders, host governments and the private sector. Many of these programmes already cultivate broad partnerships, mobilise communities to shift norms, and address the unique needs of married children—all key principles for fostering transformative change to end harmful practices like child marriage. To make greater progress on child marriage, however, greater focus needs to be placed on incorporating programming messages, activities, and structures that directly target the context-specific drivers of child marriage. For example:

Many programmes are uniquely positioned to directly address risk factors for and consequences of child marriage.

• Engaging with religious leaders who provide traditional marriage ceremonies;

• Working to change the attitudes about child marriage among boys ("future husbands") and family members (fathers, brothers, mothers, aunts) who conduct marriage negotiations or advise girls about marriage;

• Addressing social norms or economic constraints that put pressure on families to marry their daughters early.
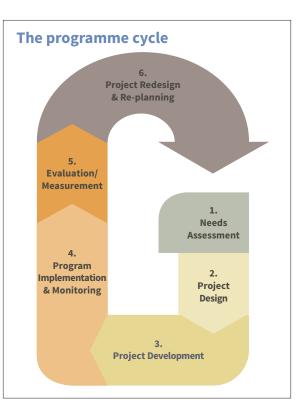
Incorporating child marriage across the programme cycle

Effectively integrating child marriage prevention and response into programmes across sectors is ideally something that can be done throughout the entire programme life cycle (figure to the right). Such integration must be suited to the particular programmatic context, as well as the capacity of programme implementers. Combined with robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E), it will also contribute to the global evidence base. In this regard, given the limited evidence that currently exists regarding the effectiveness of sectoral programmes that incorporate child marriage, donors and implementers can have impacts well beyond the particular populations they are trying to reach.

Considerations for donors working on child marriage:

• What are the key drivers of child marriage in the country and what support structures do married adolescents need?

• What programmes are we funding that could also address and measure progress on child marriage in high prevalence countries?

• How does child marriage affect other development and human rights work? Statistics and qualitative information from a needs assessment or gender analysis can inform this assessment.

• Is there funding for sectoral goals that could be leveraged for work to address child marriage?

• How can we share lessons learned about what works and ensure these inform future programme cycle budgets, resources, and planning?

The programme cycle

- 6. Project Redesign & Re-planning
- 5. Evaluation/Measurement
- 4. Program Implementation & Monitoring
- 1. Needs Assessment
- 2. Project Design
- 3. Project Development

Incorporating child marriage into each stage of the programme cycle:

1. A **Needs assessment** can provide a good understanding of the role of child marriage—its prevalence, causes and effects, and relationships with other programme focuses—in a particular programmatic context. It also helps to identify potential and priority groups of beneficiaries and target audiences.

• Based on the child marriage-related findings of the needs assessment, funders should include child marriage objectives, activities, and indicators in requests for proposals. Funders can require applicants to consider how to integrate child marriage into their sectoral programming.

2. Project design should be informed by the findings of the needs assessment, including a strong theory of change, programme activities, and implementation and M&E plans.

• Incorporating a gender analysis at this stage can help identify and respond to context-specific drivers of child marriage and gender inequality more broadly to ensure that the programme is addressing the different needs of stakeholders affected by child marriage. These stakeholders may include married and unmarried women and girls, as well as men and boys.

- Design programmes that specifically target and recruit girls who are at risk of child marriage and those who are already married. In particular, programmes should try to reach out-of-school girls, who are often among the most vulnerable.

Findings from strong programme evaluations can be used to improve the project and inform future child marriage programming.

- Raise community awareness on the harms of child marriage, how programme activities can address drivers or consequences associated with child marriage, and what alternatives are available for girls.

3. Project development can then appropriately target beneficiaries and audiences, outline an action plan, and identify and account for potential barriers and facilitators to the project's success.

- Train front-line project staff on how to effectively address resistance from girls, parents, and other community members.

- Ensure sector-specific programs consider and address the gender inequalities that underpin child marriage practices, for example, norms related to inheritance, sexual and reproductive health, and school dropout.

4. These steps provide a solid foundation for **Programme implementation and monitoring** throughout the intervention to ensure that the programme is achieving its intended effects, reaching its intended beneficiaries, and making adjustments along the way.

- Conduct a baseline assessment before programme implementation begins so that change can be measured. At a minimum, programmes should record the age, sex, and marital status of participants at the outset of programme implementation as well as at the midline and/or endline.

- As part of performance monitoring, programmes should track a few key indicators related to child marriage, such as sex, age, and marital status of participants. To better understand key context-specific drivers and solutions to preventing and responding to child marriage, programmes must collect data on child marriage-related outcomes. (See the M&E section and accompanying sector-specific briefs for indicators)

- Use surveys to monitor shifts in attitudes and behaviours related to child marriage, such as attitudes about the value of girls, educational attainment, health outcomes, participation in income-generating activities, and incidence of GBV. This information can come from third-party sources or implementers.

- Implementers incorporating child marriage into their sectoral programming should report on progress, as well as any unintended consequences that result from addressing child marriage.

5. A strong **Evaluation** can provide information about the suitability and effectiveness of the approach, and some designs can provide valuable information about costing, cost-effectiveness, and scalability.

- In addition to the sector-specific outcomes of interest, programme evaluations should also measure changes in broader gender norms. Evaluations can measure whether there are changes in societal expectations for boys and girls; changes in educational and economic opportunities and outcomes for female and male adolescents; and whether girls have increased power to negotiate marriage formation, important decisions related to health (such as child bearing and birth spacing), and how household financial and other resources are used.

6. Inform **Project redesign and re-planning** with the findings from the evaluation to improve the project as well as future child marriage programming. Findings should inform adjustments to programme implementation, future programme design, and with the dissemination of findings, the broader field.

- Donors and their implementing partners should share findings with host governments and, as appropriate, support host-country efforts to bring about change at the national level based on the results of programmes. This collaboration can be part of the project design.

- Donors play an important role in directing resources towards evidence-based programme design as well as expanding the evidence base by supporting research to fill evidence gaps. Areas in need of evidence generation include:

  o Understanding the best approaches for preventing and responding to child marriage in particular contexts and how to scale them. Research is needed to test different programmatic approaches and combinations of approaches to understand the most comprehensive and cost-effective methods of addressing child marriage.

  o More research is needed to understand how to effectively engage men and boys, in-laws, and religious and cultural leaders, as well as other stakeholders in child marriage prevention and response efforts.

  o More data is needed to document the cost of child marriage prevention and response interventions so efforts can be replicated and scaled up.

At a minimum, all programmes should collect sex and age disaggregated data grouped at a minimum in five-year age bands: 10–14, 15–19, 20–24.

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E)[1]

From donors' original conceptualisation of a programme, all the way through design and implementation, thinking through the appropriate indicators is a powerful tool for funders, implementers, and researchers to assess whether programmes are focused on the right areas, record advances related to child marriage, and adjust course when needed. *Girls Not Brides*, in collaboration with the Aspen Institute, recently compiled a list of Recommended Indicators for child marriage programming, along with a User Guide to help practitioners select the right indicators for their programmes. Collecting data related to these indicators can enable implementers to:

- Understand the different circumstances various groups of individuals face;

- See how the programme affects various groups of participants in different ways;

- Track their progress;

- Adjust programming for greater impact;

- Compare the effects of their programme to that of other programmes;

- Communicate impact; and

- Attract funding.

The tables below provide essential prevalence indicators that capture the scale of child marriage in a particular country or region, as well as general child marriage indicators at the individual level, family and community level, and institutional level. These indicators are relevant for any sector or strategy and capture some of the most important aspects of child marriage prevention and response. The indicators represent a mix of intermediate and long-term outcomes. Some data points can be obtained from existing national-level surveys, and some data need to be collected through local surveys. Implementers can choose indicators that are most relevant to their work. At a minimum, all programmes should collect sex and age disaggregated data (age disaggregated data should be grouped at a minimum in five-year age bands, i.e., 10–14, 15–19, 20–24). In the sector briefs, we have provided a few illustrative indicators that are relevant for programming within each sector. These sector-specific indicators will enable implementers to measure linkages between child marriage prevention and response efforts and sector-specific outcomes.

Essential child marriage prevalence indicators:

Indicator	Data source
Percentage of women/men aged 20–24 who were first married or in union by age 18	Data are collected and made publicly available via UNICEF MICS, DHS, UNSD, and national censuses in many countries. These data are representative at the national level, though sometimes district/ regional level disaggregation is possible. More localised data could be collected via community- or programme-level surveys.
Percentage of women/men age 20–24 who were married or in union before age 15	Data are collected and made publicly available via DHS and UNICEF MICS. These data are representative at the national level, though sometimes district/regional level disaggregation is possible. More localised data could be collected via community- or programme-level surveys.
Age at first marriage, female/male Median age at marriage	Data are collected and made publicly available via UNICEF MICS and UNSD. These data are representative at the national level, though sometimes district/regional level disaggregation is possible. More localised data could be collected via community- or programme-level surveys.

General child marriage indicators at the individual level:

Indicator	Data source
Ideal age of marriage for girls/boys	A survey of individuals in the target population (likely among individuals below age 18).
Percentage of married girls/boys who say that they wanted to get married at the time that they were married	A survey of individuals in the target population
Degree of girls'/boys' control in intimate relationships	A survey of individuals in the target population
Extent to which girls have life goals that are beyond traditional roles of mother, wife, and home-maker	A survey of individuals in the target population, complemented by qualitative methods (focus groups and in-depth interviews).
Percentage of unmarried girls/boys who are confident in their ability to pursue alternatives to child marriage	A survey of individuals in the target population.

For more general and sector-specific indicators, please see the accompanying sector briefs, as well as the full **USAID CEFM Resource Guide,** and *Girls Not Brides'* **Recommended Indicators** and **User Guide** — all available in the Suggested Further Reading available at the end of this Overview.

General child marriage indicators at the family and community levels:

Indicator	Data source
Extent to which adolescent girls (married and unmarried)/women are satisfied with their allocation of time to productive and domestic tasks and with the available time for leisure activities	A survey of individuals in the target population. Methods pulled from IFPRI's WEAI can be found on its website.
Percentage of girls (married and unmarried) who report having a say in important decisions	A survey of girls in the target population.
Extent to which parents envision roles and trajectories for their daughters that are beyond traditional roles of mother, wife, and home-maker	A survey of individuals in the target population.
Percentage of parents and in-laws of married girls who say they support their daughters (or daughters-in-law) going back to school or participating in out-of- school life skills programmes or income generating activities	A survey of individuals in the target population.
Percentage of parents who say that they will not marry their sons/daughters to a girl/boy younger than 18	A survey of individuals in the target population.
Percentage of key stakeholders (parents, adolescents, young people, community and religious leaders, and members of local government) who know about the harms of child marriage, discrimination, and violence	A survey of individuals in the target population.
Percentage of key stakeholders (parents, adolescents, young people, community and religious leaders, and members of local government) who believe that it is harmful to get married before age 18	A survey of individuals in the target population.
Percentage of community members who participated in public activities on child marriage, human rights of girls, girls' education, and violence prevention (e.g., campaigns, rallies, participatory discussions)	Reports of implementing partners and monitoring mission reports. A survey of individuals in the target community could also be used.
Number of influential leaders and communicators (traditional, religious, cultural, political, and media) who have made public declarations against child marriage and in support of alternative roles for girls	Statements, reports, press, and religious affairs directorate (or other entity) that keeps records of sermons.
Percentage of male family members of unmarried adolescent girls who report intervening on behalf of girls' rights	A survey of individuals in the target population

General child marriage indicators at the institutional level:

Indicator	Data source
Number of news media stories that discuss ending child marriage, related gender norms, or alternative paths for girls	Media scan/tracking using Google News alerts, LexisNexis, social media search engines; media outlet records.
Number of edutainment programmes, dramas, or films aired on television or radio that wholly or in part address child marriage and related gender norms	Media outlet records.
Percentage of people who report they heard or saw something in the media (news, drama/film, campaign ad, social media) on ending child marriage, related gender norms, or alternative paths for girls	A survey of individuals in the target population.
Extent to which educational, economic, or social opportunities for girls at risk of child marriage or married girls are addressed in related sectoral policies (e.g., education policy, adolescent health policy)	Review legislation and legislative debates, where available. Review statements by cognizant ministers or other responsible officials.
Percentage of districts in a country with a District Action Plan on child marriage, with specific departmental actions facilitating collaboration and indicators of success	Review administrative records, possibly coupled with interviews of district officials.
Existence of national strategy and plan of action to address child marriage and other harmful traditional practices	Review national legislation and legislative debates, where available. Review statements by cognizant ministers or other responsible national officials.
Percentage of the budget allocated to support a jurisdiction's strategy and action plan to address child marriage	Monitor the budget within the targeted jurisdiction (national, regional, district, etc.).

Key resources

We provide below a list of some of the top resources for donors, implementers, and advocates seeking more information regarding child marriage background, programming, and measurement. This Overview and the accompanying sector briefs are intended to serve as quick, go-to resources for a broad audience. They are based on the *Child, Early, and Forced Marriage Resource Guide* (2015), written for USAID by Allison Glinski, Magnolia Sexton and

Lis Meyers on behalf of ICRW and Banyan Global. For additional references, programme examples, and further information, we encourage users to make use of the expanded guide, resources, and extensive bibliography available in the original *USAID Child Early and Forced Marriage Resource Guide*, located here: https://www.usaid.gov/documents/1865/child-early-and-forced-marriage-resource-guide.

Suggested further reading

Girls Not Brides. (2014). **Theory of Change on Child Marriage**. http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/theory-change-child-marriage-girls-brides/

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UNICEF. (2015). **State of the World's Children 2015: Reimagine the Future**. New York, NY: UNICEF. http://sowc2015.unicef.org/

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