Taking action to address child marriage:
the role of different sectors

Youth

There are 1.8 billion people between the ages of 10 and 24 alive today—the largest youth population in history. Adolescence and young adulthood represent a time of pivotal shifts with the potential to change the trajectory of one's life course. During this life stage, youth develop a system of beliefs and gain new cognitive and emotional skills and the foundation of knowledge and assets that will serve them for the rest of their lives. In many cases, youth is also a time of family formation. The decisions about if, when, and whom to marry, in particular, represent a critical point that holds the possibility of propelling both males and females into a cycle of positive or negative development and life outcomes. Young people's conditions and decisions during this life phase can influence their health and well-being throughout their lifetimes. These life trajectories affect not only the individual, but can also have impacts on families, communities, and nations.

Youth programmes cover a range of issues and may include individuals as young as 10 and as old, in some cases, as 29 years of age. This period spans multiple life stages with very different needs and risks, as well as opportunities for intervention. Youth programmes have the opportunity to make a direct impact on the lives of those who are most vulnerable to child marriage, as well as the potential to influence child marriage prevention and response. In particular, since many of the norms regarding the roles and value of women and girls and men and boys in society are solidified during youth and adolescence, engaging youth in efforts to transform gender norms is critical in breaking the cycle of child marriage. Youth-focused programmes that work with men and boys, as well as girls and woman, are a key entry point for transformative gender norm change.

Strategies for integrating child marriage

- Engaging youth in the design, implementation, and evaluation of programmes
- Targeting vulnerable youth
- Innovative approaches to promote gender-equitable norms among youth, such as sports, dramas, and social media campaigns
- Safe spaces
- Life skills and empowerment programming
- Initiatives to enhance livelihood skills and income-generation opportunities
- Initiatives that increase girls' access to and the quality of schooling
- Opportunities for developing social networks
- Community sensitisation and mobilisation
- Youth participation in advocacy efforts

Integrating child marriage prevention and response into youth programmes

Fostering gender-equitable norms among youth can contribute to reductions in child marriage and healthier unions later in life. Providing youth, particularly girls, with opportunities and safe spaces to learn new skills and develop social networks builds their resilience. In addition, delaying age at marriage can help ensure that girls stay in school, continue to build social networks, and participate fully in their communities, thus enhancing their agency and

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self-confidence. In turn, when girls are empowered and provided with opportunities to learn skills and build their self-confidence and self-efficacy, they are more likely to delay marriage than girls who do not have these opportunities. In this way, increased empowerment is not only essential for delaying marriage – it can also expand girls' voice, agency, and participation in decision-making in their own lives and in their natal and marital homes.

Engaging youth in activities and education to modify gender norms can potentially change not only attitudes, but also behaviours, including among boys and young men. Using approaches that engage both boys and girls to change harmful gender norms can help achieve the joint goals of gender equality and reduced child marriage. Men and boys are important change agents for gender equality, so programmes that work with men and boys have a unique opportunity to build a new generation of men that refuse to support or engage in child marriage. In addition, engaging youth in the design, implementation, and evaluation of activities can improve the relevance and effectiveness of programming. Youth-led organisations and initiatives can be particularly effective in both addressing issues that are most important to youth and increasing young people's self-confidence, leadership, and voice.

In addition, keeping girls and boys in school, providing skills training programmes, and providing safe spaces for boys and girls to challenge gender norms, build social networks, and develop their self-awareness and self-esteem, all empower youth and help them through

challenges they will face throughout their lives. Enhancing youth's assets can better equip them to pursue alternatives to child marriage, such as education and livelihoods opportunities. These assets will also enable youth to better recover from political, economic, and natural shocks. Programmes and policies that provide second-chance opportunities for education and income generation build girls' ability to overcome hardships and provide them with alternatives to child marriage. Work readiness and life-skills training for youth also provide a critical opportunity to integrate gender awareness into programming.

In many cases, efforts should target the most vulnerable girls with the least access to opportunities and resources that can help them avoid or delay marriage. When girls have access to safe spaces to interact with peers and supportive adults, they can increase their technical skills, self-awareness, self-confidence, and social skills. These assets in turn empower girls by increasing their self-efficacy and broadening their aspirations, as they see new opportunities within their reach. Programmes that support girls' voice and participation in family and community decision-making processes can also impact the how families and communities value girls and which roles they view as appropriate for them.

Programme examples

Abriendo Oportunidades, implemented by the Population Council, and funded by a wide range of donors, works with indigenous girls, ages 8 to 18 in rural Guatemala, helping them navigate transitions to adulthood. The programme aims to increase girls' social support networks, connect them with role models and mentors, build their life and leadership skills, and provide hands-on professional training. Abriendo Oportunidades also engages community leaders and trains girls to run community girls' clubs—safe spaces where they learn practical skills and assume leadership roles. These clubs give girls a chance for learning, recreation, and social interaction, while encouraging them to consider alternatives to child marriage and childbearing. Child marriage was a key consideration during programme design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. After participating in the programme, many girls reported that they wanted to delay their marriage. Among programme leaders, 97 per cent delayed marriage until after age 18.

Minority Education for Growth and Advancement—Skills for Youth (MEGA SkY), funded by USAID and implemented by The Education Development Center (EDC) and the International Youth Foundation from 2009-2011 created learning opportunities for marginalised children and youth, especially within the Muslim community, across four states in India. The programme increased access to quality formal and non-formal education for students, and especially girls. The programme also provided youth with vocational skills that aligned with employers' needs. MEGA SkY deployed youth volunteers to help implement the programme and ensure that services provided were relevant and responsive to the needs of youth. While the programme did not specifically target married girls or girls at risk of child marriage, by focusing on marginalised youth, including girls and out-of-school youth, they were able to reach those at risk for child marriage. To effectively address child marriage, youth programmes could integrate child marriage prevention into programme implementation by including trainings and curricula related to the harms of child marriage and to build knowledge, skills, and resources to avoid the practice. In addition to collecting age and sex-disaggregated data, youth programmes could incorporate child marriage into programme monitoring and evaluation by collecting data about programme participants' marital status and shifts in attitudes and behaviours related to gender norms.

Monitoring and evaluation: illustrative examples
An initial and powerful way to integrate child marriage prevention and response into programming is by measuring changes related to child marriage, learning how these changes impact other programme areas, and then adjusting programming accordingly. The following are sample indicators that can be used in youth programmes to understand child marriage-related impacts. For a more complete list of indicators, please refer to the USAID Child, Early, and Forced Marriage Resource Guide or *Girls Not Brides'* Measuring Progress: recommended indicators.

Monitoring and evaluation: illustrative indicators

Indicator	Data source and notes
Percentage of adolescent girls who are members of groups for girls that address areas like life skills, protection, nutrition, health, sexual and reproductive health rights, and gender norms	A survey of individuals in the target population. It may be useful to disaggregate by age and location of group member.
Percentage of girls who feel they can advocate for themselves	A survey of individuals in the target population. This indicator could measure girls' perceptions that they can effectively advocate for themselves in their communities, and that they have opportunities to do so.
Percentage of unmarried men/boys and women/girls who believe the proper age of marriage for a girl is 18 years or older	A survey of individuals in the target population. A potential survey question could ask respondents, "In your opinion, what is the proper age of marriage for a girl/boy?"
Number of male youth leaders/ adolescent peers engaged in activities to prevent child marriage, exploitation, and violence	A survey of individuals in the target population.
Percentage of adolescent girls who are members of groups for girls that address areas like life skills, protection, nutrition, health, sexual and reproductive health rights, and gender norms	A survey of individuals in the target population. It may be useful to disaggregate by age and location of group member.
Percentage of girls who feel they can advocate for themselves	A survey of individuals in the target population. This indicator could measure girls' perceptions that they can effectively advocate for themselves in their communities, and that they have opportunities to do so.

Suggested further reading

The briefs in this series are based on the Child, Early, and Forced Marriage Resource Guide (2015), written for USAID by Allie Glinski, Magnolia Sexton and Lis Meyers on behalf of ICRW and Banyan Global. References, programme examples, and further information can be found in that guide, located here: https://www.usaid.gov/documents/1865/child-early-and-forced-marriage-resource-guide.

For additional information, see:

Barker, G. (2003). **How do we know if men have changed? Promoting and measuring attitude change with young men. Lessons from Programme H in Latin America.** Expert Group Meeting on "The role of men and boys in achieving gender equality." 21 to 24 October 2003, Brasilia, Brazil. Available at: http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/men-boys2003/OP2-Barker.pdf

Coalition for Adolescent Girls. (2015**). Partners and allies: toolkit for meaningful adolescent girl engagement**. Washington, DC: Coalition for Adolescent Girls. Available at: http://coalitionforadolescentgirls.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/CAGPartnersandAlliesToolKit_10.compressed.pdf

Greene, M., & Levack, A. (2010). **Synchronising gender strategies: a cooperative model for improving reproductive health and transforming gender relations**. Population Reference Bureau. Available at: http://www.igwg.org/igwg_media/synchronizing-gender-strategies.pdf

Malhotra, A., Warner, A., McGonagle, A., & Lee-Rife, S. (2011). **Solutions to end child marriage: what the evidence shows**. Washington, DC: ICRW. Available at: http://www.icrw.org/files/publications/Solutions-to-End-Child-Marriage.pdf

Warner, A., Stoebenau, K., & Glinski, A. (2014). **More power to her: how empowering girls can help end child marriage**. Washington, DC: ICRW. Available at: http://www.icrw.org/sites/default/files/publications/More%20Power%20pages%20Web.pdf