

JOIN US IN ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE



Today, one in four young women will be married in childhood. **Child marriage is a human rights violation on a vast scale and a major obstacle to sustainable development.** Girls are disproportionately affected; levels of child marriage among boys are about one fifth of the levels among girls. Around 750 million girls and women alive today were married in childhood, and unless progress is accelerated, that number will remain at least as high through 2030¹.

Child marriage robs girls of their childhood, denies them the chance to determine their own future and poses grave threats to their health, with inter-generational consequences for children, families and communities. Ending child marriage is essential to enable millions of adolescent girls the opportunity for a better life and to realize their full potential, while improving maternal and child health worldwide.

The social and political will to eliminate child marriage is stronger than ever. The Sustainable Development Goals include a dedicated target to eliminating child, early and forced marriage and other harmful practices as a key component of advancing gender equality and the rights of women and girls. This demonstration of political will is bolstered by multiple resolutions on child, early and forced marriage in the UN General Assembly and the Human Rights Council.

In this context, **UNFPA and UNICEF launched the Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage** in 2016. The programme has a 15-year strategy to promote the rights of girls to marry only after they have reached the age of 18, addressing the underlying conditions that perpetuate the practice and support girls already in union. The joint Programme, in partnership with governments and civil society, is turning commitment into

tangible action to transform the lives of girls by using five proven strategies to end child marriage:

- building the skills and knowledge of girls at risk of child marriage;
- supporting households in demonstrating positive attitudes towards adolescent girls;
- strengthening the systems that deliver services to adolescent girls;
- ensuring laws and policies protect and promote adolescent girls' rights; and
- generating and using robust data to inform programmes and policies relating to adolescent girls.

With well-established country presence, UNICEF and UNFPA bring strong partnerships and robust expertise to ensure prevention, protection and care services across sectors for girls at risk of and affected by child marriage.

Since its launch, the programme has been engaging critical influencers and decision-makers, ranging from international and regional officials, to heads of state, girls and boys. Partnerships fundamental to achieving ground-level results and meaningful change are being made, including with regional bodies like the African Union, civil society, such as the global network *Girls Not Brides*, non-governmental organizations, faith-based organizations, academia and the private sector.

The Global Programme focuses on adolescent girls aged 10-19 at risk of marriage or already in union in 12 high-prevalence and/or high-burden countries: Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Yemen and Zambia.

¹ UNICEF global databases, July 2017.

EARLY RESULTS ARE ENCOURAGING.

In 2016, more than one million girls and 1.7 million community members in Africa, the Middle East and South Asia were reached with services and messages related to ending child marriage. Seven of the twelve countries have developed national strategies to end child marriage, three of which are costed. Highlights of actions taken in the programme countries include the following:

Sierra Leone:

The programme mobilized religious and traditional leaders to act to end teen pregnancy and child marriage by engaging schools and communities to support adolescent girls' empowerment. As a result, over 5,000 girls were successfully re-enrolled in school.

Burkina Faso:

Community sensitization, scholarships, bicycles and learning kits encouraged support for girls' education as an effective method of preventing child marriage. The Ministry of Education funded the training of 43,000 teachers in the Child-Friendly Schools approach, a method that improves educational quality.

Niger:

The Illimin programme reached more than 25,000 girls. When compared to national averages, graduates of the programme say they wish to marry and have children later in life, and have fewer children.

Ethiopia:

More than 51,000 girls were supported with interventions to improve girls' retention and performance in school including strengthening girls' clubs, enhancing counselling and training teachers on sexual and reproductive health, gender-based violence and child marriage.

India:

A multi-platform edutainment series reached 2.8 million people with information on social issues, including child marriage, between October and December 2016.

Nepal:

The Nepal Girl Summit hosted by the government catalysed a commitment of US\$ 500,000 from the President for interventions on child marriage and adolescent girls' empowerment, the endorsement by the cabinet of the National Strategy on Ending Child Marriage and the establishment of an inter-ministerial steering committee.

Ghana:

The National Adolescent Health Policy and Strategy was launched, which will address both the needs of girls at risk of marriage, as well as married girls.

Uganda:

The National Strategy to End Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy was implemented in 30 districts and 51 additional districts have allocated funds to implement Child Marriage Action Plans.

Zambia:

The programme worked with 910 traditional leaders to influence gender norms around child marriage, champion leaders as agents of change, and to train them to refer girls and boys at risk of child marriage to services.

Mozambique:

A radio drama, *Ouro Negro*, reached approximately one million people with child marriage prevention messaging. More than 35,000 adolescents were engaged in a youth-led text messaging service called 'SMS Biz' that promoted participation and counselling of young people on sexual and reproductive health, including child marriage.

Yemen:

Social work and case management systems have been strengthened in six governorates to identify and to respond to cases of child marriage and children at risk of child marriage.

Bangladesh:

Nearly 100,000 adolescents received basic literacy and numeracy along with life skills through an initiative so successful that the government agreed to roll-out 5,000 new adolescent clubs throughout the country.

To learn more about the Joint Programme, visit www.unicef.org/end-child-marriage or contact Nankali Maksud, the Global Programme coordinator, at nmaksud@unicef.org