

The interlinkages between climate change and child marriage: Learning from emerging evidence and practice

CRANK research meeting brief

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PICTURED: Supported by her uncle, his boat and the UNICEF/Jagorani Chakra Foundation “Let Us Learn Project”, 10-year-old Tawhida continues her education despite heavy and prolonged flooding in Shantiganj, Bangladesh, 2024. Almost one in three girls in this region marry or enter a union before age 18.¹ Keeping girls in education is one of the best ways to prevent child marriage. Photo: © UNICEF/UNI636920/Himu

Why focus on child marriage and climate change?

We know:

- For every 10% change in rainfall due to climate change, child marriage increases 1%.²
- Girls and adolescents are the most severely impacted by both issues.

But:

- Climate change and child marriage are often addressed in isolation. Girls and adolescents – including those who are, or have been, married (ever-married girls) – are rarely represented in climate policy.
- Responses are often short-term, only dealing with the period immediately after climate shock or marriage and not the longer-term consequences.
- The impact of climate change on child marriage is indirect and varies by context.

What this brief is

This brief summarises insights shared during a Child Marriage Research to Action Network (CRANK) research meeting on climate change and child marriage, which brought together over 170 researchers, practitioners, advocates and donors to explore emerging evidence, practice and strategies, and their implications for prevention, adaptation and response. The full notes, presentations and recordings are available on the [research meeting page](#).

The evidence shows:

- For every **10% change** in rainfall due to climate change, child marriage **increases 1%**.³
- Drought is linked to a **4% decrease** in child marriage in India.⁴
- Drought is linked to a **3% increase** in child marriage in West, Central, East and Southern Africa.⁵
- Droughts **did not change** national child marriage prevalence in most countries in a 61-country study.⁶
- By 2025, climate change will cause at least **12.5 million girls** in 30 low-/lower-middle income countries to leave school.⁷



Key takeaways & recommendations

1.

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.

TAKE ACTION

Consider the relative weight of economic and social forces – and individual and group consequences – in household decision-making.

2.

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.

TAKE ACTION

Take a lifecycle approach to understand, prevent and respond to climate change and child marriage beyond the moment of marriage or disaster.

Lifecycle approaches consider later consequences of climate change (like migration, urbanisation, disrupted education) and child marriage (poor health, labour market participation) for long-term mitigation and response.

3.

Engaging in drafting policy documents – including on climate, gender, education and social protection – at the national level is central to ensuring 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 that centres girls’ and women’s lived experiences.

TAKE ACTION

Address the intersection of climate change with child marriage in risk assessments and intervention design, budgeting, implementation and measurement. Ensure interventions are quantified for funding, including by multilateral climate financing mechanisms (e.g. [Green Climate Fund](#) and the [Adaptation Fund](#)).

Engage in drafting Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), which are due in September 2025. The National Adaptation Plans ([NAPs](#)) and climate change Gender Action Plan ([ccGAP](#)) are going through the same process.

4.

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.

TAKE ACTION

Engage with relevant ministries – like those for gender, social protection, education and agriculture – and service providers at the local level. Focus on delivering initiatives like school feeding and smart agriculture in areas vulnerable to food insecurity and/or with low school attendance and female labour market participation.

Invest in climate-resilient communities with early warning systems, water-resource management, crop diversification, alternative livelihoods and social protection systems.

5.

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.

TAKE ACTION

Use creative communication like storytelling formats and materials to help translate research into grassroots action, and bring community voices, experiences, negotiations and adaptation strategies into more nuanced research, policy and news stories.



Resources

- [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](#).
- Faith Mwangi-Powell's TED talk: [Why climate change is code red for girls](#).
- 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 a [technical brief](#) and [infographic](#) on child marriage and environmental crisis.
- 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 Mauel, 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](#).



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).
- **A comprehensive framework and theory of change specifying what about climate change matters** – where, how and when does most impact on child marriage occur?
- **To use the existing evidence to inform programming;** and to explore what programming works to prevent and respond to climate-related child marriage and its consequences.



Help us build a more inclusive evidence base

We are committed to building a more diverse, inclusive evidence base on what works to address child marriage and advance girls' rights. To be a part of it, you can:

- [Submit](#) your research, briefs or toolkits to the CRANK research tracker so others can learn about your evidence.
- [Join the CRANK](#) for resources and opportunities to participate in research meetings.

References

¹ *Girls Not Brides*, n.d., [Child marriage atlas: Bangladesh](#) [accessed May 2025].

² UNICEF, [Is an end to child marriage within reach?](#), 2023.

³ Ibid.

⁴ 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).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Palmer, A. Y., Masuda, Y. J., Harou, A. P., Greene, M. E., Das, J. D., Bawah, A. A., Kwauk, C. T., MacDonald, G., Robinson, B. E., Baumgartner, J. and Koski, A., *The effect of drought on the rate of child marriage in 61 countries*.

⁷ Malala Fund, 2021, [A greener, fairer future: Why leaders need to invest in climate and girls' education](#).