

Girls Not Brides UK Briefing Paper 11th October 2013

On the United Nations International Day of the Girl Child 2013, this paper outlines the need to end the harmful human rights violation that is child marriage. Child marriage was the theme for the inaugural International Day of the Girl, which took place in 2012. A year on we believe it is vital to again draw attention to the plight of girls affected by child marriage, who are often taken out of school as a result of marriage or pregnancy and do not return to education.

In line with the theme of the day in 2013, 'Innovating for Girls' Education' Girls Not Brides UK is focussing on the actions required to end child marriage by 2030, key to which is ensuring all girls can have a good quality education.

Child marriage - a global problem

Child marriage is a violation of children's human rights. Despite being prohibited by international human rights law and many national laws, child marriage continues to rob millions of girls around the world of their childhood. It forces them out of education and into a life of poor prospects, with increased risk of violence, abuse, ill health or early death. While boys are also married as children, child marriage affects girls in greater numbers and with consequences which can be devastating for their health and well-being.

One in three girls in the developing world will be married by their eighteenth birthday.¹ If current trends continue, more than 140 million girls will be married as children by 2020. That's 14 million every year or nearly 39,000 girls married every day.²

Child marriage is a public health issue as well as a human rights violation. Girls married early are more likely to experience violence, abuse and forced sexual relations. They are more vulnerable to sexually transmitted infections (including HIV) and their sexual and reproductive health is placed at serious risk.³

Childbirth at an early age is associated with greater health risks for the mother. In low- and middle-income countries, complications of pregnancy and childbirth are one of the leading causes of death in young women aged 15–19 years. Unwanted pregnancies may end in abortions, which are often unsafe in this age group. There were an estimated three million unsafe abortions among 15–19 year olds in 2008.⁴ Stillbirths and

¹ UNFPA, *Marrying Too Young: End Child Marriage*, New York: UNFPA, 2012.

² UNFPA, *Marrying Too Young: End Child Marriage*, New York: UNFPA, 2012.

³ IPPF, UNFPA, The Global Coalition on Women and AIDS, *Ending Child Marriage: A Guide For Global Policy Action*, IPPF: London, 2006.

⁴ WHO(2011) Guidelines on Preventing Early Pregnancy and Poor Reproductive Outcomes Among Adolescents in Developing Countries

death in the first week of life are 50% higher among babies born to mothers younger than 20 years of age, than among babies born to mothers 20–29 years old.⁵

International Day of the Girl

The International Day of the Girl was adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 2011, and takes place on the 11th October each year. The day is an opportunity to highlight the rights of girls and the challenges faced by girls around the globe.

The theme in 2013, 'Innovating for Girls Education' allows us to highlight the negative impact child marriage has on girls' access to, and completion of primary and secondary education. Children who are married are half as likely to attend school as unmarried children, and girls who become child brides, and consequently early mothers, are often withdrawn from school in order to take care of their families. In addition, when girls are unable to complete school, they face the long term burden of drastically reduced earning potential, and the risk of poor maternal health.

This year's theme is also important, as it reminds us that as a global community we must continue to identify and advocate for innovative ways to provide all girls, especially girls and young women who are missing out on school as a result of early marriage or motherhood, with the means to access a quality education.

For the Girls not Brides UK network, Innovating for Girls Education means finding innovative ways to work in partnership, influence policies, work with communities, and provide a space for girls themselves to participate and engage with decisions that affect their lives. In particular this should include education which seeks to challenge and transform socially-defined gender roles and norms with the ultimate aim of achieving gender equity within education.

Ending child marriage by 2030

Underpinning child marriage is a combination of poverty, gender inequality and a lack of protection for children's rights. These drivers are reinforced by unequal power relations between adults and children and deeply rooted gender stereotypes that affect the status of girls including notions of purity and virginity. These are frequently compounded by limited access to quality educational and employment opportunities. Given its multiple causes and consequences, ending child marriage will require a cross-sectoral and coordinated approach to prevention and response.

Girls Not Brides UK believes that with concerted action we can end child marriage by 2030. The new post Millennium Development Goal framework has the potential to contribute to ending child marriage by 2030, through including a specific target and indicators on ending child marriage, as recommended by the High Level Panel report,⁶ and the UN Secretary General's report.⁷

A cross-sectoral and coordinated approach to ending child marriage should include educating and empowering girls, ensuring their voices are heard in all decisions that affect them, supporting young people to become activists for change, mobilising and educating communities, bringing men and traditional leaders on board, enacting and enforcing laws that set a legal minimum age for marriage, raising awareness in the media; sexual health and reproductive rights education and services.

⁵ http://www.who.int/maternal_child_adolescent/topics/maternal/adolescent_pregnancy/en/index.html

⁶ <http://www.post2015hlp.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/UN-Report.pdf>

⁷ <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/A%20Life%20of%20Dignity%20for%20All.pdf>

Child marriage and equitable quality education

Child marriage is a major barrier to progress on girls' education. There are strong correlations between child marriage and girls dropping out of school. For instance over sixty per cent of child brides in developing countries have no education.⁸ There are also strong correlations between the level of a girl's education and whether they will marry young. With secondary schooling, girls are up to six times less likely to marry as children when compared to girls who have little or no education.⁹

The low status of girls is the underlying social norm that links child marriage and girls' lack of access to education. When parents and families regard girls *only* as future wives and mothers they may not consider their potential to contribute economically to their families, and this may in turn serve as a disincentive for families to invest in girls' education. Therefore, work to end child marriage and improve education for girls must be integrated with wider interventions to shift gender norms and increase girls' participation in decision making, directly addressing the status of women and girls.

Recommendations to the UK government

As the Girls Not Brides UK partnership, our recommendations focus on the UK government. We believe that coordinated national and international level action is required to end child marriage and we are calling on the UK government to:

1. Continue to demonstrate global leadership on ending child marriage

The Girls Not Brides UK network welcomes the strong leadership shown by the UK government on the issue of child marriage within the High Level Panel report, and the UN Secretary General's post 2015 report, and this must continue.

We call for:

- Prime Minister, David Cameron, to publicly support the global campaign to end all child marriage by 2030.

2. Support quality education for all girls and boys as key to the fight against child marriage

Education is a key facet in the fight against child marriage. Schools also have a role in challenging entrenched social norms about the role and status of girls.

Girls Not Brides UK welcomes the UK government's education policy position paper¹⁰ and calls on the government to ensure that its recommendations are implemented across all DFID supported education programmes. Girls Not Brides particularly values DFIDs work with governments and civil society organisations to rapidly improve data on the efficiency and effectiveness of education systems, including data on school completion, teacher and pupil attendance and, most critically, learning outcomes.

⁸ UNFPA, *Marrying too Young: End Child Marriage*, 2012

⁹ Jain, S., & Kurz, K., *New Insights on Preventing Child Marriage*, International Center for Research on Women, 2007

¹⁰ Department for International Development (2013) *Education position paper: Improving learning, expanding opportunities*

We call on the UK government to ensure:

- Girls who are at a high risk of dropping out of school and being married early - often the poorest girls in rural areas - are directly targeted, along with their families and communities, by programmes to improve access to quality education.
- Further investment is provided for programmes which promote child rights and gender equality through education.
- All education data is disaggregated by gender, age and marital status, so that the level of drop out as a result of child marriage is accurately understood.

3. Support the creation of an enabling environment for ending child marriage

A girl's choice over if, who and when to marry is all too often in the hands of parents and guardians. These choices can be guided by dominant family and community expectations, norms and beliefs. Environments which are more supportive of parents' decisions not to marry their daughters at an early age are critical to enable girls' own decision-making. This can be supported through engaging in dialogue with parents and traditional and religious leaders to identify steps to reduce child marriage, as well as supporting awareness-raising and public education programmes at the national and community level.

We call on the UK government to:

- Support programmes that focus on engaging, educating and mobilising parents and communities as crucial steps to changing social norms, throughout their funding and across their programmes, especially those focussed on education.

4. Promote an integrated, multi sectoral approach to ending child marriage

An integrated, multi sectoral approach is needed to end child marriage, this requires collaboration and partnership between relevant government departments (such as education and health care), law enforcement agencies, the judiciary, child protection services, human rights bodies, women's groups, community-based organisations, religious and traditional leaders, civil society organisations and communities.

Government agencies need to work together to ensure comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights information and services; support economic and livelihood opportunities for girls at risk of child marriage; provide support to girls and boys who are already married and recognise and promoting the participation of girls and boys in decisions that affect them. In countries where child marriage is a significant issue, governments should develop a task force to specifically tackle the issue.

We call on the UK government to:

- Work with national governments to ensure that child marriage is a cross cutting issue across all government departments.

5. Establish a funding stream for early marriage

The announcement of the DFID funding stream for £35 million to tackle FGM/C sends a clear message that the UK government believes that FGM/C can be ended within a generation, and that the UK government is committed to supporting efforts to achieve this generational shift. A similar funding stream is needed for

child marriage as this would enable grass-roots and community-based organisations to access the funds needed to build an evidence base about effective programming in addressing child marriage; to evaluate and scale up promising programmes and to invest in initiatives that challenge the entrenched social attitudes which legitimise early marriage.

We call on the UK government to:

- Develop a cross sectoral funding stream to support efforts to end child marriage

6. Use all international opportunities to promote action on child marriage

Key opportunities over the next 12 months include continued pressure for a specific target on ending child marriage in the post-2015 development framework; the autumn 2013 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, and the Commission on the Status of Women in March 2013.

We call on the UK government to:

- Use all forthcoming international opportunities to promote the case for ending early marriage and to challenge other countries and international institutions to join these efforts.

About Girls Not Brides UK

Girls Not Brides UK is a partnership of UK based non-governmental organisations (NGOs) united in the belief that child marriage is a harmful practice, and serious human rights violation that can and should be ended. Child marriage is a harmful practice that affects millions of children every year, predominantly girls. As members of Girls Not Brides UK, we are joining together to accelerate efforts to prevent child marriage, and to support girls who are or have been married.

Girls Not Brides UK will defend the rights of girls to health, education and the opportunity to fulfil their potential as well as amplify the voices of girls at risk of child marriage; child wives and child mothers. In line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, we believe that 18 should be the minimum age of marriage for boys and girls globally, including the UK. Members of Girls Not Brides UK will work together to enhance and strengthen efforts to end child marriage at community, local, national and global levels. We will also work together to strengthen the capacity of members to ensure institutional awareness of child marriage.

Girls Not Brides UK is a national partnership of the global Girls Not Brides partnership to end child marriage. We will work with other national networks to influence the UK government, the EU and the United Nations, to give visibility to colleagues in developing countries.

Members of Girls Not Brides UK

Plan UK (Co chair), FORWARD (Co Chair), ACCM UK, Anti-Slavery International, CAME Women and Girls Development Organisation, ChildHope UK, EENET CIC, Equality Now, Former Child Wives Foundation UK, IKWRO, Independent Yemen Group, IPPF, Make Every Woman Count, ODI, PANOS, Population Matters, SafeHands for Mothers, The International HIV/AIDS Alliance, World Vision.