Summary

Child marriage captured the attention of many international media outlets around the Girl Summit. *Girls Not Brides* secured coverage across the BBC and some of its most influential domestic and international programmes, such as BBC Newsday, Radio 5 Live, Focus on Africa, and Woman’s Hour.

*Girls Not Brides* was a “go-to” resource for many journalists looking to cover the Summit and to talk to experts and/or individuals with first-hand experience of child marriage.

This report is a compilation of the media coverage of child marriage that *Girls Not Brides* secured around the Girl Summit. It includes key statistics on social media and online engagement. An annex of all articles can be found at the end.

Broadcast – TV

**BBC News Focus on Africa ran a report on child marriage in Zambia** (22/07), featuring *Girls Not Brides*, Mrs Graça Machel, traditional leaders, and Plan Zambia, followed by a live interview with *Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda* (World YWCA, AU Goodwill Ambassador for Campaign to End Child Marriage) about child marriage in Africa.

**Sky News TV interviewed Heather Hamilton, Global Coordinator of Girls Not Brides** (20/07) and *Mabel van Oranje, Chair of Girls Not Brides* (22/07, available [here](#)). They also interviewed a survivor of child marriage supported by *Girls Not Brides* member IKWRO.

**Arise News TV interviewed Heather Hamilton** (20/07) as part of their live coverage of The Girl Effect Live. Arise News TV has a strong viewership among African diaspora in the UK and Nigeria.
Broadcast - Radio

**BBC Newsday** (22/07)  
*Estimated audience: 188 million*
- Live interview with Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda – aired 06h50 GMT
- Kakenya Ntaiya (Kakenya Center for Excellence) – aired at 07h25 GMT

**BBC Focus on Africa** (22/07, available [here](#))  
- Ran a story on child marriage in Zambia, which was organised by and quoted Girls Not Brides together with Plan Zambia. The story was later aired alongside an interview with Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda

**BBC Outlook** (24/07, available [here](#))  
*Estimated audience: 40 million*
- Interviewed Qamar Naseem (Blue Veins)

**BBC Radio 5 Live** – Special edition on the Girl Summit (22/07, available [here](#))  
*Estimated audience: 6 million*
- Live discussion with Heather Hamilton and Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda

**BBC Woman’s Hour** (22/07, available [here](#))  
*Estimated audience: 4 million*
- Interviewed Qamar Naseem (Blue Veins)

Newspapers

**The Toronto Star:** [Number of child brides “staggering”, UN agency says](#), 22/07:
- Quotes Girls Not Brides

**The Telegraph:** “[The day David Cameron, Freida Pinto, and crowd of real, tearful, women came together to fight FGM](#), 22/07:
- Features interviews with Amina Hanga (Isa Wali Empowerment Initiative) and Kerry Smith (Plan UK); links to the Girls Not Brides website.

News wires

**Thomson Reuters Foundation:** “[Child brides abducted, raped, married to appease gods, settle debts](#), 18/07:
*3rd most popular article on Trust.org several days after publication*
- Interview with Francoise Moudouthe, Girls Not Brides’ Africa Regional Officer
- Republished on The Guardian Global Development

**Thomson Reuters Foundation:** “[Ethiopian girl was married at 10 to ‘protect her’ from rape](#), 18/07.”
Features interview with Francoise Moudouthe; Safe Hands for Mothers’ film on child marriage
Republished on allAfrica

Thomson Reuters Foundation: “Reviving Kenyan ‘return to school’ policy may end teenage mums’ poverty, ignorance”, 22/07:

- Interview with Chi-Chi Undie from Population Council in Kenya

Lusa: “Casamentos prematuros contribuem para probeza de Moçambique”, 22/07:

- Interview with Albino Francisco, from ROSC in Mozambique
- Republished in several Portuguese-language publications

Online

The Guardian Global Development - “As long as it exists, child marriage will stand in the way of gender equality”, 22/07:

- Blog by Heather Hamilton, Global Coordinator of Girls Not Brides.

BBC News Africa - “Zambian child bride: ‘I was forced to marry a stranger’”, 22/07:

- The story was covered on BBC Focus on Africa TV and on several programmes on the World Service radio.

The Guardian Global Development Professionals Network: “Ending child marriage: NGO hopes for the Girl Summit”, 22/07:

- Interviews with Heather Hamilton, Girls Not Brides Global Coordinator, and members: Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda (World YWCA, AU Goodwill Ambassador), Annabel Erulkar (Population Council), Qamar Naseem (Blue Veins), and Justine Kwachu (Women in Alternative Action).

The Guardian Global Development Professionals Network: FGM and child marriage: Grandmothers are part of the problem and the solution, 17/07:


Sky News: “Girl Summit aims to end child marriage”, 22/07:

- Interview with Heather Hamilton, and a woman survivor of child marriage who is supported by IKWRO

Devex: “Gender equality takes center stage – but will resources reach the grassroots?” 29/07:

- Interviews with Arvind Ohja (URMUL Trust), Justine Kwachu (Women in Alternative Action – WAA Cameroon), Moses Ntenga (Joy for Children) and Peter Ndonwie (Pan African Organisation for Research and Protection of Violence on Women and Children)

allAfrica: “Girls deserve better than child marriage”, 22/07:
- Blog by Dr Isatou Touray (GAMCOTRAP).

**IPS News:** [Focus on child marriage, genital mutilation at all time high](https://ipsnews.net/), 23/07:
- Features Ann Warner (ICRW), Lyric Thompson (*Girls Not Brides USA*) and Shelby Quast (Equality Now)

**Virgin Unite:** “Ending child marriage: Time for action”, 22/07
*Potential social media reach: 425,000 people*
- Blog by *Girls Not Brides*, including infographic on education
- Shared by Virgin Unite and Virgin on social media

**ONE:** “These former child brides are standing up for girls in Ethiopia”, 22/07
*Potential social media reach: 1,600,000 people*
- Features *Girls Not Brides* (including infographics, link back to website), The Former Child Wives Foundation
- Shared by ONE on social media

**allAfrica:** [Africa: Child marriage around the world](https://allafrica.com/), 22/07:
- Statistical look at the 20 countries with the highest child marriage prevalence rates, with a focus on Africa. The list is from, and credited as, the *Girls Not Brides* website.

**The New Internationalist:** “Morocco’s caravan of hope and the struggle to end child marriage”, 14/07:
- Features Fondation YTTO

**Virgin Unite:** “What does freedom mean to you?”, 23/07:
- Includes *Girls Not Brides* infographic on child marriage and the law

**Social media highlights**

**Timeframe: 07 July – 28 July**
- Our active support to the Girl Summit pledge generated **916 shares** of the Girl Summit pledge across social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, and supporter newsletter), almost 10% of the total number of pledges.
- *Girls Not Brides*’ live-tweeting from The Summit was widely followed, with **750 re-tweets** over the course of the day. Our live-tweeting of BBC 5 Live coverage of the Summit totalled 230 shares from just **2 tweets**.
- In the lead up to the Girl Summit, a number of *Girls Not Brides*’ tweets were re-tweeted over 20 times, with some close to 70 re-tweets, and a number of them – including a [tweet](https://twitter.com) comparing the 14 million figure to the UK’s youth population – were shared over **200 times**. We were re-tweeted or tweeted at by **key influencers** such as Human Rights Watch (1.3
We potentially reached close to 7 million people on Twitter (6,709,000) over this time period.

- In the lead up to the Girl Summit, our Facebook posts reached an average of 22,000 people daily. The conversations were lively and a number of posts were shared over 200 times or more.

- We now have over 40,000 fans on Facebook (+2,500) and approximately 25,000 followers on Twitter (+1,500).

- Approximately 12,000 people visited the Girls Not Brides website from 7 July to 28 July, generating 36,000 page views.
Lawmakers, aid workers, advocates gather in London for Girl Summit 2014, focusing on ways to end child marriage and female genital mutilation.

As many as 700 million women alive today were married as children — a number UNICEF says will not decrease without an acceleration of the global effort to end the damaging practice.

Though the prevalence of child marriage is dropping “slightly,” the development agency said Tuesday, population growth means the number of young brides could remain stagnant.

“Let’s not forget these numbers represent real lives,” UNICEF executive director Anthony Lake said in a statement. “We can’t let the staggering numbers numb us. They must compel us to act.”

UNICEF’s statistics were released as lawmakers, policy experts, aid workers and advocates gathered in London for Girl Summit 2014, which was co-hosted by the agency and the British government.

“It is absolutely clear about what we are trying to achieve,” British Prime Minister David Cameron said in a text of his speech released by Downing Street. “That is to outlaw the practices of female genital mutilation, and childhood and early forced marriage, to outlaw them everywhere, for everyone within this generation.

“That is the aim. That is the ambition.”

Child, early and forced marriage is also a Canadian foreign policy priority, and Canada was represented at the summit by Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird, who earlier this month announced a $20-million, two-year commitment to UNICEF’s efforts to eradicate the practice.

The issue is one of human rights, Baird said in an interview from the London school where the summit was being held, but also of poverty eradication: “This creates a cycle of dependency. Poverty just continues because a young woman doesn’t get an education, can’t support herself or her family,” Baird said.

“And if you want an economy — take the economy of Ethiopia — to be able to do better, you can’t have it simply firing on four cylinders. You need to get all eight cylinders going, and that means getting the full strength of the women involved.”

Girls Not Brides, a U.K.-based umbrella organization that campaigns against child marriage, says the practice makes achieving the majority of the UN Millennium Development Goals — which include universal primary education, gender equality and combating disease — impossible.

“Simply put,” Girls Not Brides says, “the international community will not fulfil its commitments to reduce global poverty unless it tackles child marriage.”

Girls who are married as children are unlikely to continue their education, and are at greater risk of disease, domestic violence and complications from pregnancy.
The summit’s other focus was the issue of female genital mutilation, which UNICEF says affects about 130 million women and girls, mainly in Africa and the Middle East. Another 60 million are at risk of being cut by 2050. “Beyond extreme physical and psychological pain, girls who undergo FGM are at risk of prolonged bleeding, infection, infertility and death,” the organization said.

The British government has waged a campaign against the practice in the U.K. On Tuesday, Cameron announced increased funding to help those who have already been subjected to FGM and to protect those at risk. The government also plans to introduce legislation that would allow parents to be prosecuted if they failed to protect their daughters.

In his speech to the summit, Baird noted that FGM is illegal in Canada — and that it is also illegal for parents to take their daughters overseas for the procedure.

“It’s a barbaric practice. It’s completely unacceptable, it goes to the very heart of gender equality,” Baird said. “The root of both female genital mutilation or cutting, and early and forced marriage is that some societies — some people — don’t put the full worth and value on the life of a girl. And that’s the thing we’re fighting.”

The Telegraph – The day David Cameron, Freida Pinto and crowd of real, tearful, women came together to fight FGM (22/07)
By Radhika Sanghani

"I still have flashbacks: the screams, the sounds and the smell of blood."

These are the words of Alimatu Dimonekne, who on Tuesday spoke at the UK's first Girl Summit - aimed at ending the illegal practices of female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage. She was subjected to FGM when she was 16 years-old, just before she came to university in Britain. "Getting me cut was my grandmother's gift to me - it was my preparation for marriage and she didn't want me to forget my culture," she continues.

"I was told if you ever talk about this, you will die."

New UK measures

Dimonekne is just one of the 130 million women across the world who have been subjected to FGM - an illegal cultural practice where a women's genitalia is cut. In the UK, she is one of 137,000 women who have had the procedure done to them.

It's why she's come to the Girl Summit - a conference co-hosted by the UK Government and UNICEF, which is taking place in a London secondary school.

Walworth Academy in south London is buzzing with expectation. There are about 600 young people here - many more than expected (and almost half are male). There are famous faces, including Slumdog Millionaire actress Freida Pinto, who speaks at the close of the conference telling a silenced audience: "I think about the fear a girl faces seconds before she's taken to a forest, with her legs spread open and pinned down. I think about the fear a girl child faces when she
realises the man she has to marry is older than her father. What if that was me? I'm scared to think about that as a possibility for myself. I'm not brave."

Speaking about her opportunity to talk at the summit, she said: "There are some girls who don't have this opportunity. Some girls are told that speaking up doesn't exist as an option."

It's a sign of just how high profile these issues have become and how many voices have joined the swelling chorus to demand that they be ended.

Those voices have come together from all over the world. This may be UK hosted summit, but the focus is on cultural diversity. Everywhere you turn, someone is wearing colourful native dress. The audience seems to move and think as one - when FGM, or forced marriage, survivors speak, they tear-up collectively. When new measures are announced, they nod vigorously.

**Why we're here**

The summit aims to end FGM and forced marriage - not just globally, but in Britain. It's why Home Secretary Theresa May, who is co-leading the day, takes it as an opportunity to announce drastic new measures to end FGM, as well as forced, child and early marriage.

From now on, parents who fail to safeguard their children will be prosecuted; professionals who fail to reports cases will be punished; FGM survivors will have anonymity during court cases; and the police and schools will be given guidance to improve awareness.

On top of that, the UK Government has announced a £1.4 million National FGM Prevention Programme.

**But is it enough?**

Kerry Smith, head of advocacy and research at Plan UK, thinks it's a good start.

"The Government's saying it's a problem here in the UK and we're taking it seriously," she says. "We're saying we can end child marriage and female genital mutilation together."

"What's great is it's not about Tory, or Labour or Lib Dem - it's about the UK Government saying we'll take it seriously. I think party politics hasn't come into this issue."

This has been surprising to the audience at the summit - most of who work in organisations dedicated to helping girls and women.

Sukki Singapora, a burlesque artist and global ambassador for educational charity The Sharan Project, says: "I'm extremely impressed by the way the Conservatives have dealt with some of the issues. I do feel as a coalition Government they've been a lot more open minded and less rigid than any of us could have expected."
Indeed, in his closing speech Nick Clegg announces that: "Almost 300 UK faith leaders from all major faiths have signed a declaration condemning FGM. The declaration says FGM is not required by their religions and is a form of child abuse.

"First and foremost this is a child protection issue and to put it bluntly, we all need to do more to stop it happening."

'I want my girls to grow up equal to my son'

She was particularly impressed by the Prime Minister, who surprises the audience by holding a Q&A and gives a personal speech, saying he wanted to end the practices "in this generation".

"I'm a dad with three children," says David Cameron. "I want my girls to grow up with every opportunity that my son has, with the chance for my girls to make everything they can with their lives.

"My oldest daughter is ten. Not that much younger than some of the children that have forced marriages. Not that much younger than girls that get cut and have their lives taken away from them. This is about the world we want our children to grow up in. Sometimes we sit there and we're not quite sure what we're trying to achieve. Here, it's absolutely clear. For me the context is it's about equality."

His honesty and references to his own young daughters, went down well with the assembled audience.

"He isn't afraid of the consequences," says Singapore. "What he demonstrates is a no-fear attitude to the problem. It's really important he spoke about his daughter, bringing that issue home. "Everyone knows a young girl and can connect with that."

'A girl is a human being'

But the speaker who really gets the audience cheering - and tearing-up - is Malala Yousafzai. The 17-year-old, who was shot in the head when she was 15 by the Taliban, is a campaigner for girls' academic rights - and thinks that the one way we're going to end FGM and forced marriage once and for all is through education.

"A girl is a human being and she should be respected," she tells the crowd. "A boy has the right to live his life the way he wants and a girl should too. The best solution is educate the girls. Let's educate her and make her independent. When a girl gets independent she realises she's a person. She's a human being, she has equal rights like men have. She's not only a wife and daughter - she's a woman too."

While Cameron admits that the Government has traditionally "shied away from these issues" out of cultural sensitivity, Yousafzai speaks directly to those very communities, saying: "We shouldn't be followers of those traditions that go against human rights. We're the human beings and we make the traditions. Traditions aren't sent from heaven, from God - we make cultures. "We have the right to change them and we should."
What the summit needs

Hearing from a young woman is positive, but **Yousafzai now lives in the UK**. Amina Hanga, a member of **Girls Not Brides** who works in Nigeria, says that what the summit really should have done was invite young women from communities where FGM and forced marriage happen. Then, they would have been able to go home and educate their peers.

"It would have been a real eye opener for the girls," she explains. "When they go back to their countries, imagine what they'd say. It's a case of too many organisations and not enough real people."

Another criticism is with the summit's joint focus on FGM and child, forced and early marriage - often it seems like FGM is prioritised, especially in the UK Government's announcements.

But Norman Baker, crime prevention minister, tells me: "Today is quite FGM based because we're playing catch up in a sense. We have taken steps towards forced marriage [it was criminalised in June 2014] and have the Forced Marriage Unit. We're doing the FGM Unit today."

Will it work?

The FGM Unit - a cross-Government specialist team that will work with criminal justice partners and public services - is just one of the Government's new measures. But will they help end FGM and child, early and forced marriage within a generation?

The Prime Minister answers that question: "Will it work? We already have 230 signatures and 21 countries that have made that commitment. What this has to be about is building a global movement that doesn't end here but starts here, that we can follow up monitoring what the countries have done that have signed this. To check that people keep their promises."

What we've heard today is positive and a sign of real change - but now we need to make sure that the Government fulfils its promises. And then makes sure that all those other countries who have committed to the same cause will fulfil theirs. Accountability is key.

Smith agrees and suggests that the Government look to refine legislation as they go forward, instead of just thinking 'job done'.

While Rana Nady, a 20-year-old medical student from Egypt and a Youth For Change representative, feels similarly: "For me this is a chance to see how much the world really cares about [FGM and forced marriage]. We need them to monitor the progress. I think you guys [the UK] will do it, but I don't want to go for full trust or distrust. [Cameron's] a good politician but we have met a lot of those.

"It's not just doing the talk - it's doing the walk."
NAIROBI (Thomson Reuters Foundation) – In Ethiopia, girls are abducted on their way to school, raped and then married to their captors.

In Ghana, they are married to traditional priests and become “slaves to the gods” to pay for their family’s sins.

In Cameroon, girls are promised in marriage to settle debts while still in the womb.

“There are different forms of child marriage but all these different forms have one common point, which is the girl doesn’t have a voice,” Francoise Kpeglo Moudouthe, Africa officer for the advocacy group Girls Not Brides, told Thomson Reuters Foundation.

“Their status in the community is so low that she doesn’t even have a right to speak about this issue: if she wants to marry, when she wants to marry and who she wants to marry.”

GIRLS AS COMMODITIES

On July 22, the Girl Summit in London will bring together governments, charities, activists and business to declare their intention to end child marriage in one generation.

Fifteen of the 20 countries with the highest rates of child marriage are in Africa, and 39 percent of the continent’s girls are married before the age of 18.

Niger has the highest rate, with 75 percent of girls married before they are 18.

Moudouthe believes that the summit’s ambitious goal of ending child marriage in a generation can be achieved.

“The most important thing is to change the way that girls are viewed. For me, that really is the underlying problem,” she said. “Girls are not commodities. We cannot sell them into marriage. We cannot decide what to do with their bodies.”

Child marriage is a tradition that is practised to preserve a girl’s chastity, to strengthen ties between families and to cope, as a response to poverty. In many African countries, parents receive a bride price from the groom’s family when their daughter marries, and are relieved of the burden of providing for her.

Engagement with the 70 million child brides around the world is critical to breaking the cycle.

“It’s an inter-generational issue,” Moudouthe said. “Girls who are forced into marriage, and are not made aware of the unfairness of the situation, are likely to have daughters who also become child brides.”
In Ethiopia, Moudouthe met a 13-year-old girl breastfeeding her second baby. She had been married at the age of six or seven.

The teenage mother was attending a discussion club for child brides called Meserete Hiwot, meaning “base of life” in Amharic. The majority of mothers who attend have not completed primary school and benefit from learning about assertiveness, hygiene, financial literacy and reproductive health.

“It is so important because girls are confined in marriage. They are usually not allowed out of the house,” said Moudouthe. “Not only do they learn about their rights but also how to handle the day to day challenges. How do you know when your child is sick and what can you do about it?”

STRATEGIES

Other strategies that experts say can help to end child marriage are supporting girls to remain in school, enforcing laws banning child marriage, teaching girls skills so that they can earn money for their families and educating communities about the negative impacts of the practice.

Girls Not Brides is campaigning for ending child marriage to be made one of the Sustainable Development Goals being drawn up to succeed the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), which expire in 2015.

“When you look at the obstacles [to achieving the MDGs], child marriage is a common one in that it affects six of the eight MDGs,” Moudouthe said.

The world cannot achieve universal primary education if girls drop out of school to get married. Nor can extreme poverty be eradicated when child marriage perpetuates poverty.

The third goal, gender equality, is directly challenged by child marriage.

Similarly, it is hard to reduce child mortality and improve maternal health when young girls get pregnant and give birth before their bodies are mature.

“The children of girls who had them below the age of 15 are 60 percent more likely to die within their first year,” Moudouthe said. “And girls who are pregnant before the age of 15 are five times more likely to die or be injured during their pregnancy or childbirth [than older women].”

The sixth goal linked to child marriage is combating HIV/AIDS, which affects child brides more than unmarried sexually active teenagers.

“They are married to men who are very often much older and who have sexual experience already, and with whom they have very little capacity to negotiate for safe sexual practices,” Moudouthe said.

Thomson Reuters Foundation – Ethiopian girl was married at 10 to “protect her” from rape (18/07)
By Katy Migiro
NAIROBI (Thomson Reuters Foundation) – When 10-year-old Wube-Enat was asked, on the eve of her engagement party, if she knew her husband-to-be, she looked shyly at her feet.

“I haven’t seen him,” she eventually whispered, after prodding from her friends.

A girl who is old enough to carry water is old enough to be married, according to Ethiopian tradition.

In Wube-Enat’s Amhara region, in Ethiopia’s highlands, 50 percent of girls are married before the age of 15. By the age of 18, Ethiopia’s legal minimum age of marriage, 80 percent of Amhara girls are wives.

“She’s married in childhood because when she’s grown up, she wouldn’t be suitable,” a local priest explained in the film “Child Marriage” by Safe Hands for Mothers, which is a member of the advocacy coalition Girls Not Brides.

“Someone could have raped her and so we need to protect her.”

Wube-Enat’s husband-to-be, Abebe, was 15. He saw her when he was out collecting money for the church, and asked his father to arrange the marriage.

“They use child and youth marriage as a protective measure for their girls,” Francoise Kpeglo Moudouthe, Africa officer for Girls Not Brides, told Thomson Reuters Foundation.

“They don’t realise that by doing that they are actually exposing the girls to a lot of health hazards.”

Child brides have an increased risk of HIV, maternal mortality and other health problems.

Another girl in the film, 15-year-old Achewach, developed a fistula – a hole between her vagina and bladder – after being in labour for 12 days.

“As far as my family was concerned, I didn’t exist,” she said. “My husband divorced me straight away, before the year was out.”

On July 22, the Girl Summit in London will bring together governments, charities, activists and business to push for an end to child marriage and female genital mutilation.

“I hope the summit will be an opportunity to move beyond recognition that child marriage is a problem and towards tangible and long-term commitments in terms of policy, programming and funding that will take interventions to address child marriage to scale,” Moudouthe said.

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Reviving Kenyan “return to school” policy may end teenage mums’ poverty, ignorance (22/07)
By Katy Migiro
NAIROBI (Thomson Reuters Foundation) – Teresia got pregnant at 15 and dropped out of school because her father refused to pay her fees. Nineteen years later, she is a mother of six.

Although she wanted only two children, she was afraid that contraceptives would give her cancer. “The children just kept coming and it seems there was nothing I could do,” she told Kenya’s *Daily Nation* newspaper.

None of her children has gone beyond primary school and the family lives in a cramped two-room home.

MARRIED AT TEN

**Child marriage** – being discussed at Tuesday’s *Girl Summit* in London – is not a problem only in cultures where girls are married off to protect them from sex outside wedlock.

It also happens because teenage girls get pregnant of their own accord.

“Oftentimes, early marriage is really just an early pregnancy problem,” said Chi-Chi Undie, a researcher with Population Council who has done extensive field work in the area. “A girl gets pregnant and if the guy is ready to take you in, you are married.”

In Homa Bay County in western Kenya, 25 percent of girls aged 15 to 19 are married or in an informal union, according to government statistics, and almost half the teenage brides are married to a man less than five years older than them.

“Some were getting married as young as age ten or even younger,” Undie said.

The region also has Kenya’s highest teenage pregnancy rates. In Homa Bay County, 40 percent of 15- to 19-year-old girls are pregnant or have given birth, well above the national average of 18 percent, according to the government’s 2011 survey.

“Who’s to say who’s having more sex?” asked Undie. “It’s just about who’s protecting themselves more often… Some people are more savvy about contraception.”

Teenage pregnancy and child marriage are most common among poor, uneducated girls, the government found. These girls are the least likely to know about or use contraception.

“There are lots of myths and misconceptions about family planning,” said Undie. “You can give birth to an animal. Your child will be born looking weird… Condoms go all the way up into the stomach and don’t come out.”

BACK TO SCHOOL

Teenage pregnancy and child marriage are dangerous for the mother and her baby. Both are at higher risk of illness and death, and domestic violence and poverty are more widespread in such homes.
“It’s a cycle that’s very hard to break,” said Undie. “If the change doesn’t happen now, when a girl still has the opportunity to go back to secondary school, it affects the next generation.”

In Homa Bay, part of the region formerly known as Nyanza Province, 64 percent of women went only to primary school, government data for 2008/09 showed. Sixteen percent start but do not complete secondary school, 11 percent complete secondary school and six percent enter tertiary education. Two percent have no education at all.

The Population Council is in the early stages of a three-year project aimed at getting more teenage mothers back into school.

“We hope … to really change the way people in Homa Bay County might be thinking about a girl’s potential when she gets pregnant,” Undie said. “Her life hasn’t stopped. She can do so much to help herself and the family out if she could just be allowed to go to school.”

On paper, Kenya has a very progressive ‘return to school’ policy for teenage mums, introduced in 1994.

“A girl that gets pregnant is really supposed to be allowed to remain in school for as long as she thinks she can,” said Undie. “After delivery, she is supposed to be allowed to come back. Or she is supposed to be given support to gain admission into another secondary school if she feels there are issues of stigma and discrimination.”

The policy also says that pregnant schoolgirls and their parents should receive counselling to help them work things out.

In addition, secondary education is nominally free in Kenya. The government pays for teaching while students’ families fund transport, uniforms and meals.

“Despite the really brilliant policy, a lot of school personnel are not really well versed in it,” said Undie.

“Teachers don’t want them back. There’s always that sense that: ‘Letting you be here is sort of contagious. It will cause other girls to get pregnant while they are here and it’s not ok’. The school environment is just hostile.”

Undie and her team will meet the heads of every government secondary day schools in Homa Bay County to hear their views. They will also talk to girls who have dropped out of school, the husbands of child brides, parents, teachers and students about reviving the school re-entry policy.

In January, the Emmy-award winning social communications firm **Well Told Story** will start broadcasting a radio soap opera focused on an out-of-school teenage mother to get people thinking and talking about the issue.

“As people have more information and live vicariously through an exciting radio character, I think they are more likely to dare to test the waters,” said Undie.
She has a track record of success. A similar project managed to boost contraceptive use among child brides from 38 to 46 percent in one year.

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**Lusa - Organização Casamentos prematuros contribuem para pobreza de Moçambique (22/07)**

O coordenador do Fórum da Sociedade Civil para os Direitos da Criança, Albino Francisco, indicou que os dados oficiais mostram que 48% das mulheres com idades entre os 20 e 24 anos tenham casado antes dos 18 anos e 10 por cento antes dos 15 anos.

"A situação é preocupante e a redução do problema é muito lenta: nos últimos 10 anos, só desceu de 56% para 48%", afirmou à agência Lusa em Londres, onde participa na "Cimeira da Rapariga" co-organizada pelo governo britânico e pela UNICEF para combater a Mutilação Genital Feminina e o Casamento Prematuro.

Moçambique ocupa atualmente, em conjunto com Madagáscar, o 10º lugar dos países com maior prevalência de casamentos prematuros, que Albino Francisco atribui aos elevados índices pobreza, sobretudo nas zonas rurais, e a práticas culturais enraizadas em Moçambique.

Por outro lado, o ativista critica o governo por ter despertado tarde para o fenómeno e só recentemente ter criado uma estratégia e campanha nacionais de combate aos casamentos prematuros.

"Não existem políticas nem programas concretos ao nível governamental para fazer face a este problema. O quadro legal é suficiente informado para a proteção da criança, mas tem muitas lacunas no que diz respeito a questão do casamento prematuro", enfatizou o coordenador do Fórum da Sociedade Civil para os Direitos da Criança.

A organização não governamental continua a fazer pressão junto das autoridades para rever o quadro legal para passar a criminalizar o casamento prematuro, cujo impacto pode ter várias vertentes.

"Há consequências a nível da saúde sexual e reprodutiva, ligadas à gravidez precoce porque a rapariga não está preparada para receber filho, o que pode resultar na mortalidade infantil e materna ou na contração de fistula obstétrica", referiu.

Segundo Albino Francisco, 35% raparigas engravidam precocemente, o que em certos casos pode acontece entre os 11 e 13 anos.

Disse ainda que o casamento prematuro é uma causa de abandono da educação após a 5ª ou 6ª classe, o que contribui para reduzir o potencial na produtividade do país que estas raparigas poderia ter enquanto capital humano.

"Contribui para que o ciclo intergeracional de pobreza se mantenha", lamentou.
A "Cimeira da Rapariga", que se realiza hoje em Londres e junta representantes de governos e da sociedade civil, organizações internacionais e entidades privadas, vai tentar adotar iniciativas e recomendações de combate ao casamento prematuro, que se estima afetar todos os anos 14 milhões de jovens raparigas.

"É um veiculo importante para tentar influenciar políticos a tomarem decisões mais contundentes para combater este mal, aprovando não só políticas e programas, mas também recursos adequados. É preciso aproveitar este movimento global para que casamento prematuro fique na agenda política", defendeu Albino Francisco.

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The Guardian Global Development – As long as it exists, child marriage will stand in the way of gender equality (22/07)

By Heather Hamilton

Child marriage is driven by social norms that accord girls little value: we need legal and social change, and the money to make it happen.

A few years ago, there would not have been a girl summit on child marriage. Many people dismissed the practice as tradition or too tricky a problem to overcome, so the issue never made it to the top of the agenda. While many still think these things, the world has come a long way in tackling the issue.

Recently, there have been many encouraging signs of progress: the African Union has launched a campaign to encourage governments across the continent to combat child marriage; last month, the UN's human rights council held its first panel discussion on ending child, early and forced marriage in Geneva.

Child marriage happens for many reasons: poverty, fears about girls' safety, a perceived lack of other options. But, ultimately, it happens to girls because they are girls. Approximately 14 million under-18s are married each year, and the overwhelming majority of them are girls. Child marriage is driven by social norms that accord girls little value.

The consequences of such unions are more devastating for girls. Soon after marriage, child brides are expected to prove their fertility – to become mothers even though they are still children. Their bodies are not ready to cope with pregnancy and childbirth. When under-15s give birth, they are five times more likely to die in labour than women in their early 20s.

In many cases, marriage becomes the only life that child brides know. Out of school and with few employment prospects, they are almost entirely dependent on their often much older husbands. Not only does this make girls more vulnerable to abusive relationships, it gives them few options to leave and provide for themselves and their children. As long as it exists, child marriage will stand in the way of gender equality.

Girls Not Brides was founded as a partnership of civil society organisations because of our shared belief in the crucial role of grassroots activism: ultimately, change will happen in the lives of girls...
and their immediate surroundings when families and communities reject child marriage and embrace roles for girls beyond wedlock.

But for parents to envision alternatives for their daughters, we also need change on a larger scale. We need policies that create an environment that enables girls and their families to say no to marriage. Girls must have access to quality schools and parents must feel confident that their daughters will be safe on their way to and at school. Once they have completed their education, girls need access to jobs that can earn them a living and help them support their families.

The Girl Summit is an opportunity for governments to make commitments that will enable this change to come about, from committing to establish and enforce laws that set 18 as a minimum age of marriage to pledging long-term funding and programmes that make a difference in the life of girls.

The conference provides a chance for government to strengthen partnerships with civil society, and women’s groups in particular. It takes a vibrant civil society to push for the legal frameworks, development programmes and changes in community attitudes that will help end child marriage – that role should be recognised.

We hope to see the UK and other governments move beyond declarations that child marriage is a problem and commit to investing in programmes that help married girls affected by the practice.

We would like discussions to acknowledge that child marriage is not an isolated issue and that this learning will find its way into policy. An effective response to such marriages will require a coordinated approach between justice, education, health and finance ministries.

Child marriage is happening to girls on an incredibly large scale, with devastating consequences for their future and the future of their communities. For that reason, the Girl Summit cannot be isolated from discussions to develop a new set of goals for international development. Child marriage has hindered progress on six of the eight millennium development goals (MDGs) – poverty, education, gender equality, maternal and child health, and HIV-Aids.

When the summit ends, we hope governments will take this information into discussions on what will replace the MDGs when they expire next year, and make sure that ending child marriage is a standalone target in the framework.

Ending child marriage will not happen overnight, and it will not be easy either. But together, we can do it within a generation.

**BBC News Africa – Zambian child bride: “I was forced to marry a stranger” (22/07)**

By Nomsa Maseko

Seventeen-year-old Agnes (not her real name) was married three months ago to a man she had never met.
"My parents sat me down and told me I was no longer their responsibility. They wanted me to move out and start a life of my own," she recalls, sitting in the village of Chibombo, two hours' drive from Zambia's capital Lusaka.

"Things moved faster than I expected - when a stranger paid a bride price to my parents. I had no say in the matter," she says, tears welling in her eyes.

"I didn't choose this life and I'm not happy here."

Agnes agreed to speak on condition that we do not identify her. The BBC was also able to speak to her because her husband was away.

Wearing a striped T-shirt and a colourful sarong, she has a nervous and sad manner about her.

When we met her, she was going about her daily chores, washing dishes, cleaning and then starting a fire to prepare the evening meal.

It is not difficult to see how desperate her life is, her heels are cracked, her nail polish is wearing off.

Trapped
Early and forced marriages are common in Zambia. But this traditional practice doesn't just happen in Africa, it's a problem globally.

It is estimated that 14 million girls are forced into marriage before their 18th birthday every year - causing their childhoods to come to a sudden and unexpected end.

Agnes is desperate to escape her new life but fears that her parents would disown her for the disgrace that comes with being a run-away bride.

Poverty and tradition are said to be behind this practice, which is most common in rural areas.

Parents see their daughters as a source of income and even wealth, those opposed to the practice say.

But even here, some are beginning to speak out against the practice.

Chief Chamuka VI of Zambia's Lenje people wants young girls to be kept in school.

He has summoned his subjects to a meeting under a giant tree. The villagers sing, shout his clan name and clap as they see their chief approaching.

He commands respect. Community members who attended the meeting didn't disagree with anything he says.

Chief Chamuka, dressed in his traditional regalia - a black and red robe with a matching hat with feathers on it - addresses them about the dangers of child marriages.
"In my chiefdom, the stance which I have taken is that no parent shall force a girl below the age of 18 to be married. A parent who does that will be severely punished," he says.

Traditional leaders who denounce early marriage are usually frowned upon by those who believe they are defying old customs and norms that have been passed on from generation to generation.

But the chief's conviction seems unrelenting.

"I feel that in our communities there are certain customs and cultural practices that are good and some are bad - this has to stop," he says.

**Lasting effects**
Those forced into child marriage feel the effects for the rest of their lives.

Beatrice Chikwekwe got married when she was 15, she is now 32.

"I was terrified and confused on my wedding day, I didn't even know what I was doing," she says.

"I fell pregnant the same year and had complications while giving birth. I nearly died."

Ms Chikwekwe is doing her final year at the local college of agriculture, trying to make up for the time she lost.

For many though, there is no fairytale ending.

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**Child marriage in Zambia**

- 40% of Zambian girls married by 18 - one of highest rates in the world
- 9% married by 15
- Less educated girls more likely to be married early
- Girls in poorest households five times more likely to be married than richest
- More common in rural areas

*Sources: Girls Not Brides*

Campaign group *Girls Not Brides* says child marriage traps girls and their families in a "cycle of poverty".

"Girls who marry young do not receive the educational and economic opportunities that help lift them and their families out of poverty," it says in a statement.

Graca Machel, widow of Nelson Mandela and one of the group's patrons, told the BBC that traditions are not set in stone.
"Traditions are manmade and harmful traditions must be changed. As parents we don't have the right to dictate the choices that our children make," she says.

"We need to change the way families and communities view a girl. The girl-child needs to be seen as a full human being with dreams, aspirations and with the ability to thrive to the highest potential just like a boy-child."

It is estimated that girls who become pregnant before their 14th birthday are five times more likely to die while giving birth.

Back in Chibombo, aid agency Plan International Zambia is working with traditional leaders, government and other groups to rescue girls like Agnes from forced marriages.

"Where there is poverty, children are prone to abuse. We are working on educating communities about children's rights which need to be respected," says Plan spokesman Lazarus Mwale.

With her voice trembling, Agnes sums up her dilemma.

"Sometimes it is hard to defy our parents because it is disrespectful, but we can't continue to allow them to make choices that are bad for us," she says.

"It was my wish to finish school and become a nurse but I guess that will never happen because my husband won't allow me to further my studies."

The Guardian Global Development Professionals Network – Ending child marriage:
NGO hopes for the Girl Summit (22/07)
By Anna Leach

Four child marriage experts tell us their expectations and aspirations for the Girl Summit in London today

At a recent event four NGOs shared their hopes for the UK Department for International Development's Girl Summit this week, as well as their experiences campaigning against child marriage for many years and what tactics they have found successful in delaying marrying age.

Hope: leaders spend more time with people affected by their policies

I was impressed to see Justine Greening spent the whole day with the girls at the Youth for Change event. My ask is that our leaders spend time with communities in order to have appropriate policies.

We also need resources. We need funds in country at the embassy level. Yes, it's important to give funding to big international organisations because we are scaling up. But scaling up also means putting resources to the household, to the village women's group, to the urban slum.
I grew up in Zimbabwe. My mother was married when she was 15. She was grabbed out of school and married to my father. All her life she talked about education, she wanted her daughters to have opportunities in life, so this issue is very personal.

In the YWCA we invest in prevention: encouraging girls to stay in school and have life skills and age-appropriate sexuality education. We also provide emergency shelter for girls at risk.

*Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, general secretary, World YWCA, Switzerland and goodwill ambassador, Africa Union campaign to end child marriage*

**Hope: more resources on the ground**

Now there’s increased understanding and global attention on child marriage, I’m hoping that there will be more resources on the ground that reach the girls and more programmes brought to scale. This issue affects millions and a lot of the time projects just reach 500-600 girls.

We've been working for the past 15 years in various child marriage hotspots in sub-Saharan Africa to try and understand the most effective approaches to delaying the age of marriage.

In Ethiopia 10 years ago we did a programme called *Berhane Hewan* which was a package of four interventions: community conversations; provision of school materials to keep girls in school; a conditional cash transfer (a goat if the girl remained unmarried after two years) and girls groups. After two years girls on the project site were nine-tenths less likely to be married. Now we're testing the individual packages to see what could be the most cost-effective.

*Annabel Erulkar, country director, Population Council, Ethiopia*

**Hope: an evolving relationship between donors and the grassroots**

My biggest expectation from the summit will be a more mature relationship with the international community and civil society in countries. Lack of funding is one of the key issues. And we hope that the UK and other countries will use their diplomatic influence on countries that do not have legislation against child marriage.

Blue Veins is a women's group based in northwest frontier province of Pakistan. Child marriage is a big issue in Pakistan. Not only girls suffer. Boys are forced to marry much older women.

We work with religious leaders because marriages are largely performed by them. We get a mixed response. In 2014 in one of the provinces we successfully lobbied legislators to raise the age from 16 to 18. But in one of the provinces I work in we failed to change legislation, there was a strong opposition by the religious political parties. They called it a western NGO agenda. We tell them that Pakistan has signed the *child rights* convention and there are obligations that the country has to fulfil.

*Qamar Naseem, programme coordinator, Blue Veins, Pakistan*

**Hope: programmes reach millions of girls**

We need to focus on the kind of techniques that we know work and can be taken to scale. It's not enough to reach a few girls in one village. 14 million girls a year are married before the age of 18. That's the rough equivalent of the entire population of youth in the UK, boys and girls.
Girls not Brides is a global partnership of over 360 organisations from 60 different countries, which demonstrates how this issue cuts across regions and cultures. Our members work together to identify what works ending child marriage.

We've identified three things that need to happen. We need to have education for girls, community dialogue and a minimum legal marrying age of 18.

*Heather Hamilton, interim global coordinator, Girls not Brides, UK*

**Hope: cooperation across all levels of government**

I hope that we can influence policy at the traditional level, policy level, regions and globally. It's not going to end if we work in isolation. We need a concerted effort.

Cameroon is one of the countries where prevalence is high, mostly in the northern regions.

We engage the wives of these traditional leaders to communicate the need to end to child marriage to their husbands. We built an association called Queens for Peace International that brings all the wives of traditional leaders together to affect change. We think it's important to develop alternative approaches.

*Justine Ngum Kwachi, executive director, Women in Alternative Action, Cameroon*

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**The Guardian Global Development Professionals Network – FGM and child marriage: grandmothers are part of the problem and the solution (17/07)**

By Fatimah Kelleher

Girls on their own can't change the norms that endanger them. Understand the role of the other women in a girl's life

Child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM) are firmly under the spotlight at the UK government's Girl Summit this month, with both practices gaining increased recognition as barriers to both women's rights and sustainable development. But we need to move beyond the girl-centred dialogue often dominating these discussions and gain greater understanding of the role of mothers and grandmothers.

Found in diverse cultures across the globe, child marriage statistics show that one in three girls in the developing world are married by age 18, while one in nine are married by age 15. Some girls are married as young as eight or nine. FGM is found mainly in parts of Africa and the Middle East and the World Health Organisation estimates between 100 and 140 million women worldwide have been subjected to at least one of the first three steps of female genital mutilation.

Older women are sometimes at the core of such practices because they have been socialised into the patriarchal systems that uphold detrimental gender norms. "Decision-making processes for FGM are often led by older female relatives, including mothers and grandmothers, as they have the sole responsibility of making this happen as a sign of fulfilling their social responsibility", explains Naana Otoo-Oyortey, executive director of Forward, whose work on FGM specialises in community engagement.
The centrality of mothers and grandmothers' role means that they also have the potential to be disrupters. The Grandmother Project works in Senegal to strengthen communication between generations of women and also to empower grandmothers to influence male and community members towards stopping such practices. "In some cultural contexts where family decision making is collective, grandmothers play an influential role given their experience," says executive director Judi Aubel. "Conversely, it is extremely difficult for younger women, and especially for adolescent girls, to influence those decisions. It is in fact, a grandmother's culturally designated responsibility to pass on such traditions."

Girls not Brides has reported on the dangers of demonising families for continuing these practices. "Families practicing child marriage are not 'evil,' sending their children away because they don't care," says the campaign group. "Rather, they are operating within a system in which these early marriages are meant to protect the daughters they hold dear. Focusing on reasons that families practice child marriage opens up a range of possibilities to stop it." Child marriage and FGM are underpinned by a range of triggers from poverty to codes of honour and unquestioned norms integral to community identity.

Empowering girls directly has been a focus in much programming to combat these practices, and indeed, strengthening the agency of girls is central to ending them. However, girls do not exist in a vacuum; they reside within familial relationships that have nurtured them, and the consequences of acting alone in a manner considered deviant cannot be ignored.

"We can't talk about empowering the girl child without involving the society she grows up in," says Rainatou Sow, founder and executive director of Make Every Woman Count. "It is very important to involve the community as a whole, so we need a holistic approach that addresses harmful practice and makes sure that the girl child can grow healthy and empowered within her community."

Indeed, this juxtaposition between a girl's individual sovereignty to resist harmful practices and a community's importance as a home and lynchpin of a girl's identity is difficult enough in a country like the UK, where at least emergency services, the force of law and greater access to information can to a certain extent offer some support. For many girls across Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, the circumstances are shakier.

"Many laws prohibiting FGM and child marriage in Africa coexist alongside customary laws therefore nullify the effectiveness of those laws," says Naana Otoo-Oyortey, who also highlights the importance of governments committing to human rights frameworks to address this tension.

At the community level, ensuring that girls are not left isolated is critical. Just as working with men and boys is pivotal to bringing about sustained change on these issues, ignoring or underestimating the role of older women would be extremely naïve.

"The alienation of those who are viewed as being cultural authorities can lead to the further entrenchment of those same harmful traditional practices," cautions Judi Aubel. "We believe that girls cannot change norms on their own and that one of their greatest needs is to have a supportive social environment around them, and that those who can best support them are other women."
The speedy transience of girlhood alongside what are often short-term girl-empowerment interventions also needs acknowledgment. Girls become women quickly in these contexts, and some will pass beyond the reach of targeted programming even before completion of the baseline research. Many will become mothers and even grandmothers themselves in short spaces of time. With that in mind, enabling women to form a compact of protection for their daughters and granddaughters is a powerful way forward.

Sky News – “Girl Summit” aims to end child marriage (22/07)
By Rhiannon Mills

The first ever "Girl Summit" is being held in the UK, aimed at increasing efforts to end female genital mutilation (FGM) and child, early and forced marriage (CEFM) within a generation.

Co-hosted by UNICEF and the UK Government the event is being held in London and brings together government representatives, international organisations, the private sector and girls themselves to call for action.

Organisations involved say millions of girls and women are being prevented from achieving their potential, or live a life free from violence, because of harmful practices such as FGM and CEFM, which are illegal in the UK.

Sky News spoke to one Kurdish woman who, at the age of 15, was forced to marry a man she didn't know, and was subsequently beaten and raped.

Speaking through a translator, she described how her own relatives attacked her when she tried to escape.

"Her own family tried to kill her for leaving her husband," the translator said.

"They stabbed her twice, once in the chest and another in the back, and this was done by her brothers.

"When she did escape she was also prevented from seeing her children for 15 years. This has had a tremendous psychological effect."

But Diane Nammi from the Iranian and Kurdish women's rights organisation says this isn't just a distant problem.

"It happens in London, in Newcastle, anywhere in the UK," she said.

"They are doing it mainly where there is sharia law and sharia courts, and so many young girls can be wife of a man as old as their father or grandfather, they can be the second wife of a man."

It's estimated that 14 million girls are married every year before they reach 18, with one in nine across the developing world married by 15.

Some 60% of child brides are also taken out of school so they have no formal education.
In most countries the legal minimum age for marriage is 18 - but loopholes often allow it to happen as part of local customs.

The group Girls Not Brides told Sky News that change is happening within communities and families in the UK, and across Africa, South Asia, the Middle East and Europe, with more and more saying no to this form of abuse.

But Heather Hamilton from the partnership said many still don't realise the harm child marriage causes.

She said: "It's an entire end to the girl's life as her own person.

"We take it for granted that we're going to be able to make choices and have opportunities.

"We're going to be able to choose whether we get married, go to school or university.

"It's almost inconceivable for women who have the privileges we have to understand what this means, but it has a devastating impact on the girls and their lives."

A social media campaign has been launched to boost support for the event, with the Government asking people to share the hashtag #GirlSummit.

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**allAfrica – Africa: Girls deserve better than child marriage (22/07)**

By Dr Isatou Touray, GAMCOTRAP

When I was ten years old, my mother said to me: "you are going to be a woman". I was taken to the bush, songs were sung, I was laid down and my clitoris was cut. I was told it was my faith. I accepted.

For millions of girls around the world, being cut is a first step to early marriage. When girls have been cut, they are deemed ready to marry - however young they might be. It was my husband who encouraged me to take a stand. He is a medical doctor and throughout his career has seen the negative health effects of girls marrying as children; health effects that endure throughout a woman's life.

In my country, Gambia, an estimated 36% of girls are married before they are 18. In rural areas of the country, the rate is thought to be much higher. Globally, some 14.2 million girls a year are thought to be married as children.

The impact on these girls' health is devastating. Social pressure to prove their fertility often results in early and frequent pregnancies, with dangerous consequences: girls who give birth before they are 15 are 5 times more likely to die in childbirth than girls in their 20s. Death in childbirth is one of the biggest killers of girls aged 15-19 in the developing world. A link that is rarely highlighted, however, is the fact that 90% of adolescent pregnancies take place within marriage.

There's often a reluctance to talk about practices perpetuated by religious or traditional beliefs. Child marriage is a deeply ingrained tradition that few have addressed for fear that criticising such
practices was taboo. But if we are going to see better outcomes for girls and women worldwide we have to confront the practices, like child marriage, that cause them harm.

The Girl Summit 2014 promises to do just that. Hosted by the UK government, the Summit puts ending child marriage and female genital mutilation at the heart of its agenda. This week, heads of state, civil society organisations, survivors and community groups will discuss how to bring change for millions of girls and women. It is of critical importance that the Summit moves beyond words of condemnation and commit to action.

A big part of the work ahead must focus on developing a culturally sensitive response. By this I don't mean a response that condones or apologises for child marriage, rather an approach that understands and addresses why people resist calls to end such practices.

Child marriage continues not because people want to preserve something that is dangerous; it is about preserving a practice in which they believe. So you have to provide an alternative. I consult with men, the community gatekeepers. I give them power and say: "You are the decision makers. Tell me what you want for your daughters. You want them to live safe, healthy lives? You can offer them something better than child marriage. Let them marry as adults and they will raise healthier, more prosperous children."

My organisation, GAMCOTRAP, holds these conversations throughout a community: by the well, under the baobab tree, at the market or in schools. They can take place at healthcare facilities, too.

I strongly believe that hospitals, clinics and health centres should partner with organisations like ours that are working to establishing dialogue with communities on harmful practices. Healthcare programmes that incorporate community outreach will be key if we are to reduce the practices that result in high maternal and infant mortality rates.

It is also crucial that maternal health programmes take into account the unique needs of adolescent girls. It is very difficult for child brides, for example, to assert their wish to use contraception to their often older husbands. Effective family planning programmes must take this on board.

Similarly, child brides rarely have any understanding of their own sexual and reproductive health. In addition to reaching out to their male guardians, we need to develop health education programmes that inform girls about their sexual and reproductive health rights. Married adolescent girls are often shy, isolated and vulnerable. We need training for medical professionals on how to best interact with and support them.

Improving the health of adolescent girls, married and unmarried, is only part of the wider range of programmes that are needed to end child marriage. Ensuring girl's access to safe and quality education and viable economic opportunities, working in partnership with traditional and religious leaders to change mentalities, and developing strong legal frameworks, all of these will be needed. Child marriage is a complex problem with complex solutions; discussions at the Girl Summit this week must reflect that.

GAMCOTRAP is a member of Girls Not Brides, a global partnership of more than 350 civil society organisations that are determined to end child marriage. We are learning from each other about
the work that is being done to dissuade communities from marrying off their daughters as children and about effective partnerships to ensure the wellbeing of adolescent girls and child brides.

Make no mistake, addressing traditional practices and their harmful impact on girls is not easy. It takes months, even years of patient persuasion. But we can no longer shy away from addressing practices like child marriage, which threatens to rob 140 million girls in the next decade of their health and childhood.

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**allAfrica – Child marriage around the world (22/07)**

Child marriage is a truly global problem that cuts across countries, cultures, religions and ethnicities. Child brides can be found in every region in the world, from the Middle East to Latin America, South Asia to Europe.

**Top 20 Most Affected**

Child marriage: 20 highest-prevalence countries in the world (%)

1. Niger 75%
2. Central African Republic 68%
3. Chad 68%
4. Bangladesh 65%
5. Guinea 63%
6. Mali 55%
7. South Sudan 52%
8. Burkina Faso 52%
9. Malawi 50%
10. Mozambique 48%
11. Madagascar 48%
12. India 47%
13. Eritrea 47%
14. Somalia 45%
15. Sierra Leone 44%
16. Zambia 42%
17. Nicaragua 41%
18. Nepal 41%
19. Dominican Republic 41%
20. Ethiopia 41%

**Niger**

Niger has the highest rate of child marriage in the world. Every 3 in 4 girls marry before their 18th birthday. In some areas, the rates are even higher: in the region of Diffa, 89% of girls marry as children.

The link between education and the prevalence of child marriage is particularly evident in Niger: 81% of women aged 20-24 with no education and 63% with only primary education were married or in union at age 18, compared to only 17% of women with secondary education or higher.
If present trends continue, more than 1 million girls born between 2005 and 2010 will be married or in union before they turn 18.

Sources: UNFPA, 2012.

Chad

Chad has the third highest rate of child marriage in the world – 68% of girls are married as children – and, unlike many other countries, the practice is prevalent in both wealthy and less wealthy households.

In a 2013 report on child marriage in west Africa, The Ford Foundation pointed at “cultural tradition, conflict, state fragility and a general bewilderment by parents and communities about what to do with large numbers of children in the face of a failing education system and a stifled economy” as reasons why the practice persists.


Malawi

Conflicting legislation makes the minimum age for marriage ambiguous in Malawi. The constitution sets 18 as the minimum age without consent, and persons between 15 and 18 may be married with parental consent. The constitution also maintains that the state is obliged to ‘discourage’ marriages where either party is under the age of 15[i]. This is in conflict with the common law Marriage Act, which states 21 as the minimum age for marriage[ii].

A key challenge to eradicating child marriage in Malawi is entrenched attitudes that accept the practice[iii]. Child marriage is also closely linked to poverty, as often in rural areas girls will be married off very young in order to improve a family’s financial status. In the northern part of Malawi, kupimbira, or giving a young daughter in marriage as repayment for a debt, is practiced[iv].


Child marriage prevalence is the percentage of women 20-24 years old who were married or in union before they were 18 years old (UNICEF State of the World’s Children, 2013). It is based on
Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and other national surveys, and refers to the most recent year available during the period 2002-2011.

142 MILLION
If we do nothing, by the end of the decade an estimated 142 million girls will be married as children.

1 in 3 Girls
In the developing world are said to be married before 18.

400 Million
Globally, almost 400 million women aged 20-49 were married before 18.

Inter Press Service – Focus on child marriage, genital mutilation at all-time high (23/07)
By Julia Hotz

WASHINGTON, Jul 23 2014 (IPS) - As Tuesday’s major summits here and in London focused global attention on adolescent girls, the United Nations offered new data warning that more than 130 million girls and women have experienced some form of female genital mutilation, while more than 700 million women alive today were forced into marriage as children.

Noting how such issues disproportionately affect women in Africa and the Middle East, the new report from the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) surveyed 29 countries and discussed the long-term consequences of both female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage.

While the report links the former practice with “prolonged bleeding, infection, infertility and death,” it mentions how the latter can predispose women to domestic violence and dropping out of school.

“The numbers tell us we must accelerate our efforts. And let’s not forget that these numbers represent real lives,” UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake said in a statement. “While these are problems of a global scale, the solutions must be local, driven by communities, families and girls themselves to change mindsets and break the cycles that perpetuate [FGM] and child marriage.”

Despite these ongoing problems, Tuesday’s internationally recognised Girl Summit comes as the profile of adolescent girls – and, particularly, FGM – has risen to the top of certain agendas. On Tuesday, British Prime Minister David Cameron announced a legislative change that will now make it a legally enforceable parental responsibility to prevent FGM.

“We’ve reached an all-time high for both political awareness and political will to change the lives of women around the world,” Ann Warner, a senior gender and youth specialist at the International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW), a research institute here, told IPS.

Warner recently co-authored a policy brief recommending that girls be given access to high-quality education, support networks, and practical preventative skills, and that communities provide economic incentives, launch informational campaigns, and establish a legal minimum age for marriage.
Speaking Tuesday at the Washington summit, Warner added that there has been “a good amount of promising initiatives – initiated by NGOs, government ministers and grassroots from around the world – that have been successful in turning the tide on the issue and changing attitudes, knowledge and practices.”

Advocates around the world can learn from these efforts, Warner said, paying particular attention to the progress India has made in preventing child marriage. Still, she believes that a comprehensive global response is necessary.

“What we’re really missing is a coordinated global effort that is commensurate with the scale and the size of the issue” of FGM and child marriage, she said. “With 14 million girls married each year, a handful of individual projects around the world are simply not enough to make a dent in that problem.”

**U.S. action**

The need for better coordination and accountability was echoed by Lyric Thompson, co-chair of the Girls Not Brides-USA coalition, a foundation that co-sponsored Tuesday’s Girl Summit here in Washington.

“If we are going to end child marriage in a generation, as the Girl Summit charter challenges us to do, that is going to mean a much more robust effort than what is currently happening,” Thompson told IPS. “A few small programmes, no matter how effective, will not end the practice.”

In particular, Thompson is calling on the United States to take a more active stand against harmful practices that affect women globally, which she adds is consistent with the U.S Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013.

“If America is serious about ending this practice in a generation, this means not just speeches and a handful of [foreign aid] programmes, but also the hard work of ensuring that American diplomats are negotiating with their counterparts in countries where the practice is widespread,” she says.

“It also means being directly involved in difficult U.N. negotiations, including the ones now determining the post-2015 development agenda, to ensure a target on ending child, early and forced marriage is included under a gender equality goal.”

On Tuesday, the U.S. government announced nearly five million dollars to counter child and forced marriage in seven developing countries for this year, while pledging to work on new U.S. legislation on the issue next year. (The U.S. has also released new information on its response to FGM and child marriage.)

“We know the fight against child marriage is the fight against extreme poverty,” Rajiv Shah, the head of the United States’ main foreign aid agency, stated Tuesday.

“That’s why USAID has put women and girls at the centre of our efforts to answer President Obama’s call to end extreme poverty in two generations. It’s a commitment that reflects a legacy of investment in girls – in their education, in their safety, in their health, and in their potential.”

**Global ‘tipping point’**

Of course, civil society actors around the world likely hold the key to changing long-held social views around these contentious issues.
“Federal agencies, in a position to respond to forced marriage cases, must work together and with community and NGO partners to ensure thoughtful and coordinated policy development,” Archi Pyati, director of public policy at Tahirih Justice Center, a Washington-based legal advocacy organisation, told IPS.

“Teachers, counsellors, doctors, nurses and others who are in a position to help a girl or woman to avoid a forced marriage or leave one must be informed and ready to respond.”

Pyati points to an awareness-raising campaign around forced marriage that will tour the United States starting in September. In this, social media is also becoming an increasingly important tool for advocacy efforts.

“Technology has brought us a new way to tell our governments and our corporations what matters to us,” Emma Wade, counsellor of the Foreign and Security Policy Group at the British Embassy here, told IPS. “Governments do take notice of what’s trending on Twitter and the like, and corporations are ever-mindful of ways to differentiate themselves ... in the search for market share and committed customers.”

Wade noted within her presentation at Tuesday’s summit that individuals can pledge their support for “a future free from FGM and child and forced marriage” via the digital Girl Summit Pledge.

Shelby Quast, policy director of Equality Now, an international human rights organisation based in Nairobi, reiterated the importance of tackling FGM and child marriage across a variety of domains.

“The approach that works best is multi-sectoral... including the law, education, child protection and other elements such as support for FGM survivors and media advocacy strategies,” Quast explained. “We are at a tipping point globally, so let’s keep the momentum up to ensure all girls at risk are protected.”

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**Virgin Unite – Ending child marriage: time for action (21/07)**

By Girls Not Brides

Tomorrow the UK will host the first Girl Summit – aimed at ending female genital mutilation and child marriage within a generation. Hear why it matters in this guest blog by Girls not Brides.

“I was married at a time when I did not have the slightest idea of what marriage meant.”

These words are from a young woman named Rubina, recounting her life from the moment she became a child bride.

Rubina was only 12 when she was married off to a boy the same age. Theirs was an exchange marriage, or “Watta satta”, a traditional form of marriage in Pakistan which consists in exchanging brides between families.

The moment Rubina married, her world narrowed. She was forced to leave her childhood, her friends and her dreams behind. “I was not allowed to play with children my age, because I was expected to behave like a mature woman, which I was not.”

She was also forced to forgo her health: “Giving birth to a child while myself being a child was the most painful experience of my life.”
Rubina’s experience is all too common. She is one of the 14 million girls a year who are married before the age of 18, with devastating consequences for their health, their education and their chances in life.

This week, the UK government and UNICEF are hosting the first Girl Summit, a high-level event to mobilise commitments to end child marriage and female genital mutilation in a generation. At the Summit, heads of states, civil society organisations, and faith leaders will hear the stories of girls who have gone through the same ordeal as Rubina.

There is no doubt that they will be moved, shocked even, by their experiences; and we hope they will be spurred to take action. Because when 14 million girls a year are married off before 18, our world narrows too.

Child marriage has held back progress on many key development issues. How can we expect to end global poverty or achieve universal education when girls are taken out of school to be married? How can we improve maternal health when girls are giving birth while they are still children themselves? And how can we achieve gender equality when girls are only valued for their ability to be wives and mothers?

Ending child marriage will unlock many of the world’s most pressing challenges. The international community is currently negotiating a development framework, set to replace the Millennium Development Goals after they expire in 2015. Ending child marriage must be a standalone target in the new framework.

**Ending child marriage won’t be easy, but it can be done.**

Rubina continues to suffer from the emotional and physical trauma of marrying as a child, but she found the strength to stand up to her parents when they decided to marry off her younger sisters:

“My parents did not see the hardships and were determined to repeat the same mistake again by marrying off my sisters who were even younger than I was. Along with other members of the village community organisation, I convinced my parents to hold off on their decision. I wish I could convince all parents not to marry their young daughters at an early age.”

Rubina’s story is one of hardship and strength. Her determination to protect her younger sisters and the young girls in her communities is nothing short of inspiring.

Yet we won’t end child marriage by helping girls one by one. We need a comprehensive strategy that addresses the causes and consequences of child marriage across sectors.

The Girl Summit is an opportunity for governments to learn from the civil society organisations — many of which are Girls Not Brides members — that have been addressing child marriage for years what is needed to support local change, what approaches are working, and how they can be scaled up to reach as many girls as possible. It’s also a chance for governments to make commitments that will enable this change to come about. From committing to establish and enforce laws that set 18 as a minimum age of marriage, to pledging long-term funding and programmes that make a difference in the life of girls.
Only a few years ago, a Girl Summit on child marriage would have been unthinkable. Few people knew, or talked, about child marriage. But things are fast changing and we’re seeing an increasing number of governments committing to end this practice.

Last September over 100 countries, including a number of countries with high rates of child marriage, co-sponsored the first-ever Human Rights Council resolution on child, early and forced marriage. Earlier this year, the African Union launched the first continent-wide campaign to encourage African governments to adopt laws and policies to raise awareness and address the causes and consequences of child marriage.

The Girl Summit needs to build on this momentum and propel efforts to end child marriage even further.

Ending child marriage won’t happen overnight, and it won’t be easy. But together, we can end it in a generation.

**ONE – These former child brides are standing up for girls in Ethiopia (17/07)**

By Susheila Juggapah

Did you know, that around the world, [1 in 3 girls in developing countries are married before they are 18 years old](http://example.com). Early marriage is a violation of a girl’s fundamental human rights and crushes their life chances. We also know that early marriage and poverty are linked. Read more about the [cycle early marriage and poverty create](http://example.com).

Can you imagine what would happen if we empowered girls instead?

These two women are proof that given the right chances, women are change makers and will use their voice to stand up for others, even when faced with terrible circumstances.

Melka from Ethiopia was just 14 when she was married off against her will, despite the practice being illegal (Marriage under the age of 18 has been prohibited in Ethiopia since 2004).

She was hospitalised for 30 days after her husband’s friends beat her into the bedroom after her ‘wedding’.

After the authorities stepped in and her marriage was annulled, life was hard for Melka. She needed to work to survive. But she’s made it.

It was hard, but I’ve come out stronger. – Melka, Ethiopia

Melka has turned her fortune around and now educates other girls about their rights and about child marriage.

I want them to know that it’s not unlucky to be a girl in Ethiopia. – Melka, Ethiopia

Like, Melka, Alem from Ethiopia, was also made to marry when she was young.

She was married at 10, a mother and widow at 13 and was even trafficked to Egypt before she managed to reach the UK. Alem fought hard for freedom and in the end was able to gain an education.
Education is a powerful tool for change, no matter your age. It helps you define who you are; it empowers you to rise above the hurdles life has placed in front of you. – Alemtsahye Gebrekidan, Ethiopia

Alem spent years working for the education that marriage had denied her. She eventually founded her own organisation, campaigning against child marriage and supporting women in the UK who also married as children.

Both Alem and Melka fought hard and are now using their voice to support and empower other girls at risk of child marriage. They shouldn’t have to do that alone.

This summer, you’ve got a chance to use your voice and support girls around the world. Ministers and policy makers will gather in London on 22 July for the first ever Girl Summit. Public pressure from you and others around the world will help them make bold and unified pledges to act.

It’s time we empower women so they can find their voice like Melka and Alem have. Give girls a chance by adding your pledge to the Girls Summit site.

Devex – Gender equality takes center stage – but will resources reach the grassroots? (29/07)
By Anna Patton

A month ago, London drew the world’s attention to sexual violence in conflict, with former United Kingdom Foreign Secretary William Hague and Hollywood actress Angelina Jolie leading a huge public campaign to end impunity.

Another high-profile event — the Girl Summit — held in the city last Tuesday, pushed for an end to female genital mutilation and child marriage within a generation. This unprecedented attention to women’s and girls’ rights — with ministers, ambassadors and first ladies attending last week — was widely welcomed by NGOs.

Sarah Cornish, a gender adviser for Save the Children who has been working on women’s rights and gender-based violence for the past 15 years, told Devex advocates in this area were “lone voices” until relatively recently, and described the summit as “groundbreaking stuff.”

Driven in part by Secretary for State for International Development Justine Greening, the U.K. has had a bumper year for women and girls.

In spring, lawmakers approved legislation requiring all development actions to be gender sensitive. Alongside other commitments made at the End Sexual Violence in Conflict Summit in June, London is also funding a 35 million pound ($59.43 million) campaign to end FGM in Africa, while the Department for International Development announced last week additional funds of 25 million pounds over five years to help end child, early and forced marriage in 12 countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

Funding fears
But with new data revealing the extent of both longstanding practices, representatives from organizations based in the “global south” questioned whether promised resources would actually trickle down to those working directly with communities at risk.

Estimates from UNICEF indicate that 700 million women alive today were married as children, while over 130 million girls and women in the 29 most at-risk countries have undergone some form of FGM. Some countries have made remarkable progress in reducing FGM prevalence; in others, though, it remains widespread. In Somalia, for example, some 98 percent of women are affected.

“If they want to [end] this within a generation, a lot of resources will be needed — not only financial but also human resources,” Peter Ndonwie, co-founder of the Pan-African Organization for Research and Protection of Violence on Women and Children in Ghana, told Devex. “The NGOs have human resources; they are ready to do it — but if they don’t have the finances to go out and do the advocacy, to meet with communities, or support the families, how do you expect they will achieve it?”

Funding concerns are particularly acute for those working in remote areas. Resources are scarcer the further one gets from cities and main roads, said Moses Ntenga from the Ugandan NGO Joy for Children, even though child marriage is more common in rural areas.

In India meanwhile, declining external funding is also placing a strain on organizations. And yet, Arvind Ojha, CEO of the Rajasthan-based NGO Urmul Trust, told Devex: “The quantum of the problem is huge. We have to scale up the small initiatives ... We can’t wait for 20 or 30 years.”

**Everyone’s job**

DfID’s latest idea to support initiatives to end child marriage promises to establish local community-based programs and, according to an official spokesperson, the department is currently “consulting with different groups to find the best way of making sure funding reaches civil society and grassroots organizations.”

Indeed, supporting communities is among the commitments listed in an international charter to which over 235 organizations including 30 national governments have now signed up. Recognizing that “legislation alone is not enough,” the charter also commits signatories to investing in services and gathering better data.

But will it go far enough?

“[Gender equality] is not just my job, it should be everyone’s job,” said Cornish. “We need every health provider on the frontline to be screening for FGM and CEFM. We need the people providing regular services — health, education, all the big pillars — addressing this like it’s their ethical mandate ... We need it to be completely embedded throughout everything we do — otherwise we reach a fraction of the girls that need us because we’re not working through the big institutions and the big programs.”
And for Colin Walker, campaigns manager at Plan UK, FGM and child marriage cannot be addressed as isolated issues; rather, they are just two of the many manifestations of discrimination against girls.

“When boys reach adolescence, the world opens up, opportunities open up. For girls, the opposite happens,” he told Devex. “When a girl reaches puberty, she starts being seen primarily through her reproductive and sexual [roles] ... [She may be] pulled out of school, forced to marry early, forced into household chores. The environment becomes restraining.”

**Growing numbers**

The sense of urgency on FGM and early marriage comes from increasing awareness of the scale of both practices.

Prevalence of FGM — or “cutting” — has decreased: a girl today is about a third less likely to be cut today than 30 years ago, according to UNICEF. But that progress is outweighed by the increasing numbers in absolute terms due to population growth, with about seven million more women affected today than two years ago.

And in sub-Saharan Africa, population growth is set to outstrip progress on child marriage, meaning that by 2050 — even if the current rate of progress is maintained — twice as many women will have married as children compared to today’s levels.

UNICEF’s statistics and monitoring specialist Claudia Cappa highlighted that FGM, while most concentrated in 29 countries, is also practiced in other countries — some with large populations of women at risk.

“We need to push governments to gather information on other countries as well,” she said. “There is evidence that the practice exists in Indonesia, Malaysia, Oman ... but if we don’t have good data will be very difficult to make the case for intervention.”

**Social pressure**

Governments, U.K. Prime Minister David Cameron said at the Girl Summit, need to “ensure that we don’t just change the law, we change the culture.” And the message at the summit seemed to be that changing age-old practices is indeed possible.

“ Tradition is dynamic, it’s not static. It’s a dynamic process and it can be changed,” Justine Kwachu, co-founder of the NGO Women in Alternative Action in Cameroon, told Devex — echoing 17-year-old education activist Malala Yousafzai, who told summit attendees that traditions are “not sent from heaven.”

UNICEF research reinforces this assertion. In the 29 countries most affected, according to Cappa, two-thirds of men and women want FGM to stop.
“[People] are against the practice even in countries where it is very common,” she said. However, they say it should continue “because of social obligation to conform and comply with what is perceived as being a norm in the community.”

Even traditional leaders — the “custodians of culture”, as Kwachu put it — “cannot bear to see their daughters mutilated [and] cannot bear to see their daughters go into early marriage.”

The first step, say experts, is getting people to talk about it.

In Guinea, said Cappa, where more than 90 percent of girls have undergone some form of FGM or cutting, UNICEF questioned couples separately and found half of them had discordant opinions on whether or not it should continue.

“They don’t know each other’s opinion because this is not something that people talk about ... very few have the courage to bring this up,” she said. A key step is therefore to “create opportunities for women and men, of different ages, with different functions and positions in communities, to discuss and debate the practice of FGM.”

**Tactics for change**

So how are community organizations at the frontline starting up those conversations?

Joy for Children tries to help parents make the link between early marriage and the social and economic consequences for their family.

“Many people know child marriage is bad, but are not in position to relate its impact to social issues, for example someone struggling with grandchildren brought to her from the [daughter] whose marriage has failed,” Ntenga said.

In India — home to a staggering one-third of the 700,000 early marriages reported by UNICEF — Urmul Trust runs a six-month education program for illiterate girls, who are more susceptible to early marriage. More than 50,000 12-18 year-olds have graduated to date, we learned from Ojha.

The organization also works with local government leaders, trying to convince them to declare their village free of child marriage, the root cause of numerous health and social problems. The organization particularly targets the “young and freshly elected leaders,” he said — those who do come forward have attracted media attention that has prompted other villages to follow suit.

There are also more creative approaches.

In Rwanda, the DfID/Nike Foundation-funded Girl Effect program produces teen-friendly magazines and other media designed and written by teenage girls. And in Cameroon, Kwachu’s organization works to end FGM by targeting the wives of traditional leaders — the so-called “queens” — whose status makes them respected voices in the community.

He added that in many cases, these women already know that FGM is damaging and are “burdened” by that knowledge. What they don’t know is “how they can speak out against [it]. They
just need us to build their capacities more and give them the tools to go down to the grassroots, to be able to talk to the girls.”