



NUJOOD, AGE 12 (Yemen)

Nujood Ali was ten when she fled her abusive, much older husband and took a taxi to the courthouse in Sanaa, Yemen. The girl's courageous act—and the landmark legal battle that ensued—turned her into an international heroine for women's rights. Now divorced, she is back home with her family and attending school again.

Photo by Stephanie Sinclair / VII Photo / Too Young To Wed



CHAPTER

06

GIVING GIRLS A CHANCE:
AN AGENDA FOR ACTION

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The evidence presented in the previous pages amounts to a clarion call for action: for policies and programmes to accelerate the prevention of child marriage for the millions of young girls at risk, and to accelerate the provision of adequate support to girls who are already married. Rates of child marriage remain high. This is despite the overwhelming majority of countries being signatories to international charters and covenants that discourage child marriage and having laws and policies in place to prevent it. Gender inequality, lack of protection of girls' human rights, persistent traditions in favor of early marriage, poverty, humanitarian crises and tough economic realities all work to set conditions in which the practice continues.

KEY FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PROGRAMMING

The girls most likely to marry before the age of 18 reside in rural and remote areas, have little or no education, and reside in the poorest households. To assess the patterns and prevalence of child marriage, a precondition for effective policy and programmes, each country should collect and analyze its own data so that it can identify and target areas with high proportions of girls at risk. On this basis, programmes should be put in place, supported by appropriate allocation of resources, to prevent and end child marriage and to manage its consequences.

It is no coincidence that countries with high rates of child marriage are also grappling with high adolescent birth rates and high levels of maternal mortality. This calls for targeted interventions to support both married and unmarried girls. Married girls should have systematic support to help them avoid early and frequent childbearing. They should have ready access to sexual and reproductive health information and programmes that provide family planning, maternal health services, and HIV prevention and treatment. The fact that data show very low levels of satisfied demand for family planning, including contraception, among married girls underscores this need. Programmes must be put in place that enable married girls to exercise their right to identify and understand their options to delay or limit childbearing, and to receive support from their husbands and in-laws accordingly.

Countries with high rates of child marriage, high adolescent birth rates, and low levels of satisfied demand for family planning should consider a multi-pronged approach across sectors that encourages delayed marriage for girls. Such approaches should include the enforcement of laws against child marriage including the enactment and enforcement of laws that raise the minimum age at marriage to 18 for both girls and boys. Countries should expand girls' opportunities for post-primary education, especially for rural and isolated girls during adolescence, and consider incentives to families and communities to address the economic and social factors underlying child marriage. Equally important is offering girls themselves the opportunity to develop new skills and to show their families a positive alternative to child marriage. Investment in girls is not only a good in itself, but can also have a powerful multiplier effect on a range of outcomes, including population dynamics (see box - opposite page).

INVESTMENTS IN GIRLS - A DEMOGRAPHIC "THREE-FOR"

Investments in girls through adolescence provide a demographic "three-for": reducing population momentum by delaying marriage and childbearing, thereby increasing the space between generations; lowering desired family size as more educationally accomplished girls are less reliant on multiple children for security; and decreasing the age and power differential between partners, thus positively affecting women's ability to meet their fertility goals. Benefits also extend to the next generation, because those who marry later and with more authority are likely to invest in their children (especially their girl children) in ways that establish a virtuous cycle of improved health and education. Specifically, we must (1) help girls stay in school through adolescence, (2) provide social and economic alternatives to early marriage and childbearing, (3) end child marriage and support married girls, and (4) focus on the youngest first-time mothers.

Source: Bruce, J. and J. Bongaarts. "The New Population Challenge". From Laurie Mazur (ed.) 2009, *A Pivotal Moment: Population, Justice, and the Environmental Challenge*. Washington, DC: Island Press.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM EFFORTS TO ADDRESS CHILD MARRIAGE

Innovative programmes, policies and strategies to tackle child marriage are building on the growing international concern and recognition of the costs of this harmful practice to girls, their families and communities. A systematic analysis of these efforts to discourage child marriage identified five core approaches that are being implemented and their lessons learned so far:³⁴

1. Empower girls by building their skills and enhancing their social assets

Among the successful programmes are those that empower girls at risk of child marriage through, for example, life skills training, provision of safe spaces for girls to discuss their futures, the provision of information about their options, and the development of support networks.³⁵ Such interventions can equip girls with knowledge and skills in areas relevant to their lives, including sexual and reproductive health, nutrition, and their rights under the law. Girls are empowered when and if they are able to learn skills that help them to develop a livelihood, help them to better communicate, to negotiate and make decisions that directly affect their lives.

Safe spaces and the support they offer help girls overcome their social isolation, interact with peers and mentors, and assess alternatives to marriage.³⁶ As the girls develop their abilities and self-confidence, parents and community members come to regard them differently, which can help to re-shape long held views and customary assumptions. Reviews of such programmes have documented changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour related to child marriage over a period of just a few years. However, the comparative effectiveness of specific interventions (life skills versus safe spaces, for example) requires further study.

2. Improve girls' access to quality formal education

Girls' education, especially at the secondary level, is strongly associated with later marriage. Research has suggested that girls with secondary schooling are up to six times less likely to marry while children, compared to girls with little to no education.³⁷ Education is a right in itself, and being in school confers numerous protections and benefits for girls. Educational opportunities offer girls positive alternatives to child marriage that are generally acceptable to the family and community.³⁸ From a cultural standpoint, being in school can support the perception that girls are still children and hence not marriageable. Schooling helps a girl develop social networks and acquire skills and information, all of which contribute to her ability to communicate, negotiate for her best interests and participate in decisions that affect her life.³⁹

To increase girls' school access and attendance, the first requirement is that her education be free and compulsory. The second is that schools be girl-friendly. This entails improving the relevance and inclusiveness of curricula, the quality of teaching of girls, and the safety of the school environment. In particular, school policies should not discriminate against or seek to exclude married and pregnant girls. Teachers should be sensitized about issues that make girls vulnerable to dropping out of school and be encouraged to urge parents to continue to send their daughters to school. Where girls do not return to formal schooling, non-formal or alternative education programmes should be available and tailored to a girl's particular circumstances.

Many of the programmes supported by non-governmental organizations to facilitate girls' enrolment or re-enrolment in formal education have helped girls postpone marriage. However, these programmes are rarely taken to scale, and rarely integrated into the wider education system. Governments have experimented with and are increasingly supporting incentives to keep girls in school, for example by offering subsidies, scholarships, or direct cash incentives to families. The Zomba cash transfer programme in Malawi is one such approach. After just one year, girls in the programme who received conditional cash transfers were 40 per cent less likely to be married than girls in the control group.⁴⁰

3. Mobilize communities to transform detrimental social norms

Traditionally the family and elders of the community have made the decision whether, when and whom a girl will marry. Working with parents and other community stakeholders is therefore vital in changing the attitudes and social norms that perpetuate harmful practices such as child marriage. A primary goal is to create an environment in which delayed marriage becomes more socially acceptable than child marriage. At the same time, girls must be able to pursue an education or other alternatives to marriage without the fear of criticism or ridicule. Interventions that spark attitudinal change have included community dialogue, information and education sessions; efforts involving men and husbands; along with mass media messages that spread the word about the dangers of child marriage, the alternatives, and the rights of girls.⁴¹ A review of the evidence suggests that community mobilization is most effective in shifting norms when it is used in conjunction with the other interventions considered here.⁴²

4. Enhance the economic situation of girls and their families

Given that child marriage is linked to poverty, incentive-based programmes have been used to encourage and enable families to postpone the marriage of their daughters and to keep them in school through post-primary and secondary level. Incentives may include loans, scholarships, subsidies and conditional cash transfers. Employment opportunities for girls, such as those supported by microfinance schemes or opened up through vocational training, can generate viable alternatives to child marriage, especially for girls unable to continue their formal schooling.⁴³ Improving girls' economic standing can also give them a higher status in their families and on this basis, greater control over their lives. For families themselves, direct cash transfers and income-generating activities for their daughters can help to alleviate the economic and social pressures in favor of early marriage.

5. Generate an enabling legal and policy environment

Legislation against child marriage is a critical element of a comprehensive human rights approach. Legislation and appropriate enforcement measures are fundamental for defending the human rights of girls at risk. A crucial step is national and sub-national legislation to ensure that, in line with international human rights standards, the age of 18 is upheld as the minimum legal age of marriage for both males and females.

It is also imperative to promote birth and marriage registration: child marriage often goes unregistered, undermining legislation against it, making it difficult to monitor and complicating access to those subjected to it. Millions of births also go unregistered, making it difficult for girls later to ascertain what is their actual as compared to imputed age, and thus claim due protection under the law. Yet birth registration is a human right to be protected and upheld.⁴⁴

Challenging harmful customs, traditions and practices that do not comply with human rights standards (such as tolerance for gender-based violence) through national and sub-national laws and through social programmes is also an essential step. Such harmful customs and practices erode the status and dignity of girls and young women.⁴⁵ Community leaders must also be challenged to support such changes and to advocate for enforcement of legislation that prevents child marriage.

Overall, it should be noted that the analysis of these five approaches also found that many programmes to end child marriage were not well-documented or well-evaluated. However, the most promising programmes combined asset-building approaches for girls with community mobilization activities. Nonetheless, this set of five approaches that are beginning to impact on child marriage warrants further attention and suggests directions for investments in an agenda for change (described below).

UNFPA SUPPORT IN ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE

Addressing child marriage is a key component of UNFPA's work to uphold the rights of adolescents and youth. UNFPA supports partnerships and advocacy efforts to raise awareness about child marriage, including its causes and consequences. UNFPA also works with governments and partners at all levels to foster supportive policies, legislation and dialogue to promote the dignity and rights of both married and unmarried girls. Through a variety of means, including advocacy and communications efforts, UNFPA draws attention to girls' needs and realities, given the harmful and life-threatening risks they face from child marriage. In collaboration with communities, UNFPA supports programmes that enable parents, elders, religious and other leaders to identify the dangers of child marriage, promote the rights of girls, and find community-owned, collective solutions to discourage and eventually end the practice. UNFPA also assists the most marginalized and vulnerable girls in deferring marriage by advocating that they stay in school; supporting programmes that build their life skills; providing safe spaces to learn, play and make friends; delivering sexual and reproductive health and HIV information and services; and improving their economic and social well-being.

A few examples of this work in practice at country level are highlighted below:

ETHIOPIA: Changing social norms and delaying marriage for girls

In the Amhara region of Ethiopia, rates of child marriage are among the highest in the world: about 56 per cent of the girls are married by age 18, and 1 in 4 girls has given birth by age 18.⁴⁶ With the support of UNFPA in its first stage, *Berhane Hewan*⁴⁷ was one of a number of programmes that supported girls to avoid child marriage by increasing their life options.

Berhane Hewan incorporates many of the action elements described above. It promoted: schooling, functional literacy, life skills; and sexual and reproductive health and HIV information and services for girls. Girls' clubs served as platforms from which married and unmarried girls found social support, accessed mentors, and learned new skills.

At the same time, the programme sensitized communities to the risks associated with child marriage and promoted alternatives to the practice. Community "conversations" helped change

social norms that sanctioned child marriage, while economic incentives addressed the economic drivers of the practice. Families were encouraged to keep girls in school, and girls were provided with school supplies. UNFPA also worked, through the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, to encourage priests to refrain from conducting or blessing child marriages. The programme has since expanded to include the provision of water wells and husbands' clubs. Three years after the initiative was piloted in 2004, an evaluation found that girls in the programme area were nearly three times more likely to be in school than non-programme participants, and were 90 percent less likely to be married. Moreover, married girls in the programme area were nearly three times more likely to have used family planning compared to married girls in the control group.⁴⁸ The programme had the greatest impact among girls aged 10 to 14. With support from the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), the programme is now being taken to scale.

A similar programme, known as *Biruh Tesfa*, is underway and provides a combination of health, literacy, civic education and mentorship opportunities for girls who have run away from their villages to escape marriage and are now living in the slums of Addis Ababa.

MALAWI: Confronting child marriage at the highest levels of government

In this southern African country, nearly half of young women aged 20 to 24 are married by age 18.⁴⁹ In response, UNFPA worked with Malawi's National Youth Council to launch an advocacy campaign aimed at parliamentarians, calling on their support to end the practice of child marriage. The effort resulted in the repeal of a law that would have established 16 as the legal age for marriage. Plans are under way to redraft the law and high-level commitment has been given to address inconsistencies in the laws related to the minimum age of marriage. The campaign also resulted in a UN Joint Programme on Adolescent Girls that supports governments and partners to target girls at risk of child marriage and early pregnancy. The programme, led by UNFPA, encompasses non-formal education, protection from violence, mentors for vulnerable girls, and access to sexual and reproductive health and HIV services.

The new Malawi Growth and Development Strategy II, which represents the government's national blueprint for poverty reduction, highlights girls' education and delayed marriage as essential to social development. The strategy also supports advocacy for delayed marriage, girls' retention in school at all levels, and the provision of scholarships for girls most in need.

NEPAL: Helping girls help themselves—and other girls

Nepal is one of the poorest countries in the world. According to the 2011 Demographic Health Survey, 41 per cent of Nepalese women aged 20-24 years were married before they turned 18. UNFPA Nepal has conducted a series of advocacy efforts to empower adolescents and young girls in all 75 districts to mobilize their out-of-school peers. Resource centres were set up by local women's cooperatives in which adolescent girls could interact with their peers and other stakeholders and could participate in learning opportunities. In all, more than 5,000 adolescent girls in 18 districts participated in two months of training in reproductive health, focusing also on life skills. It was an engaging way for adolescent girls to learn about the changes taking place in their bodies, enhance their self-confidence and self-reliance, and consider their options in regards to education, work, legal rights, marriage, childbearing, family relations and community involvement. Many of the girls initiated dialogues with their parents concerning the risks associated with child marriage and sought support from others in their community. The project also honed the girls' problem-solving, decision-making and negotiation skills, and helped them establish supportive relationships with their peers. Following these "Choose your Future" trainings, girls spoke out against child marriage and, in several cases, were actually able to persuade parents to stop planned weddings or to refer their cases to paralegal committees.

Girls also organized programmes to encourage parents to send their daughters to school. In some cases, with others' help, girls who had been trained were able to stop weddings planned for

them and later went back to school. Other girls started savings and credit programmes linking to women's cooperatives where they further advocated against child marriage.

NIGER: Tapping the influence of village chiefs and religious leaders

In 2006, three out of four women aged 20 to 24 in Niger were married by age 18, the highest proportion in the world.⁵⁰ Moreover, women in Niger give birth to an average of seven children.⁵¹ Recognizing the socio-cultural factors at work that increase girls' vulnerability to child marriage, UNFPA is working at the community level with the Association of Traditional Chiefs to raise awareness of the perils of this practice, including the risk of maternal death and disability. Chiefs and religious leaders from the country's eight regions are identifying culturally sensitive ways to discuss child marriage and the importance of girls' education. In addition, televised Islamic religious programming is addressing the links between child marriage and maternal health. Working with traditional chiefs, the Schools of Husbands ("Ecoles de Maris") are introducing child marriage prevention in their curricula to engage men in sexual and reproductive health and to foster positive norms change for women and girls. The Schools operates in the Zinder region, where 58 per cent of young women aged 20-24 were married by age 15⁵² (compared to the national figure which is 36 per cent). Plans are underway to expand the Husbands' Schools to all regions starting in 2013.

PAKISTAN: Targeting child marriage and obstetric fistula

In Pakistan, approximately 5,000 new cases of obstetric fistula occur every year, with young girls disproportionately affected.⁵³ In 2006, UNFPA launched a fistula repair project as part of an overall programme to improve maternal health. A principal component of this four year project consists of seminars targeted at community members and healthcare professionals that explain, in a culturally-appropriate manner, the direct links between child marriage, early pregnancy and fistula.

In a further effort to create awareness, the project also runs workshops to sensitize media personnel about women's rights, child marriage, and fistula prevention and treatment. More recently, in Punjab province, UNFPA supported the formulation of a youth policy that addresses child marriage and early pregnancy. Youth networks have also raised awareness in their communities about the dangers of child marriage. Building on this work, UNFPA's next country programme will include a strong focus on ending this harmful practice.

AN AGENDA FOR CHANGE

Programmes to end child marriage have yielded promising results, created momentum and provided evidence that the right policies and programmes can make the difference that girls need and to which, by virtue of their rights, they are entitled. A growing body of evidence suggests that successful efforts reach across sectors to integrate a range of approaches that address the root causes of child marriage and simultaneously promote girls' human rights.

The evidence to date, our knowledge and experience suggest that priority should be given to actions that include the following components:

Enact and enforce national legislation that raise the age of marriage to 18 for both girls and boys.

Legislators and policymakers must review national legislation, as well as customary laws, in light of international human rights standards. But even strong legislation regarding child marriage can

be enforced too weakly or applied unevenly to the detriment of girls. Greater efforts are needed to raise awareness of and enforce existing laws at the community level, while fostering a rights culture among the judiciary, legislators and the police to protect girls from child marriage and uphold their rights overall. Birth and marriage registration systems must also be strengthened to support the enforcement of child marriage laws.

More broadly, strengthening and implementing laws on child marriage must be part of a national action plan, which should be a wide ranging and systematic effort to move towards gender equality in practice as well as under the law, remove the impediments to women's empowerment and promote their human rights.

The CEDAW⁵⁴ and CRC Committees⁵⁵ have a critical role to play by asserting pressure on individual governments to enforce laws prohibiting child marriage in line with international norms and to address the root causes of girls' disadvantaged status compared to boys. More generally, governments should promote policies of zero tolerance toward all forms of violence against women and girls, including harmful practices such as child marriage.

Use data to identify and target geographic “hotspots”—areas with high proportions and numbers of girls at risk of child marriage.

Despite a range of efforts, child marriage rates have not changed significantly for the poorest and least educated girls and those who live in rural areas. Policymakers and programme managers should utilize available Demographic and Health Surveys, Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys and/or census data to identify administrative sub-regions with high concentrations of girls at risk (in terms of either high proportions or absolute numbers).

In addition to looking at sub-regions where marriages of girls before age 18 are prevalent, programme designers and managers should identify whether these same subregions also have low levels of demand for family planning satisfied among young women; large age differences between girls and their partners; high proportions of young women experiencing violence, and other indicators of vulnerability. Subregions showing multiple levels of risk for married girls should be prioritized and would benefit from political and financial commitments and corresponding actions to end the practice of child marriage.

Data also suggest that rates of marriage among girls under age 15 are declining in some countries, while the prevalence of marriage before age 18 has remained roughly constant. This suggests that girls today may be able to avoid marriage during their early adolescence, but that the pressure is still strong to marry before 18. More follow-up studies are needed to understand this phenomenon and other issues surrounding the timing of marriages, including the protective factors associated with the avoidance of marriage before 15. That said, marriage before age 15 is still commonplace in many subregions within high-prevalence countries. Such “hotspots” should receive the bulk of policy and programmatic resources aimed at making marriage later, safer and fully consensual.

A significant part of these resources should be devoted to improving the sexual and reproductive health of adolescents, including married girls. Universal access to sexual and reproductive health information and services is a human right; but given the scale of unsatisfied demand for contraception, it will also contribute to turning downwards the curve of population growth in high-fertility countries.

Expand prevention programmes that empower girls at risk of child marriage and address the root causes underlying the practice.

Programmes aimed at preventing child marriage must employ a variety of key strategies, and the more successful ones often combine interventions into an integrated and multi-sectoral response targeted at girls and their families. These programmes must improve access to and quality

of formal education for girls, especially the post-primary and secondary level; build up girls' economic, health and social assets through the safe spaces model; address underlying economic motivations; seek to change social norms that undervalue girls; and reduce the social pressures on families to marry off their girls at early ages. Timing is key; these interventions, especially schooling and asset-building for girls, must be directed during very young adolescence (10-14 years old), a crucial period around puberty in order to counter pressures on girls for marriage and childbearing for social and economic security. Even in a short amount of time, such programmes have yielded demonstrable results at the community level. Policymakers and programme managers can adapt these models to new settings, monitor and evaluate them for feasibility and impact, and take them to scale.

Policymakers and programme managers should also leverage new opportunities offered by larger scale efforts in other sectors, especially education (for example, policies and programmes that offer incentives to keep girls in school at the secondary level, improve the quality of schooling, and teach comprehensive sexuality education); health (sexual and reproductive health programmes, including maternal health, family planning, and HIV-related services targeting the most marginalized and vulnerable girls); and poverty reduction (such as life skills, vocational training and livelihood programmes directed to adolescent girls). Strong coordination across these different sectors will be needed to promote greater synergy and maximize impact from these efforts.

Mitigate the harmful impact of child marriage on married girls.

Zero tolerance towards child marriage is the goal. However, until that aspiration becomes a reality, millions of girls will become child brides with irreparable harm to their lives, their well-being, and their future life prospects. These girls occupy a difficult and oft neglected space within society, receiving scant, if any, attention from social protection programmes. While they are still children in all respects—developmentally, biologically, physically, psychologically and emotionally—their marital status signals an end to their childhood—however premature and unwelcome—and renders them women in the eyes of society. Neither youth-oriented programmes on their own nor those targeting adult women will consider the unique circumstances of married girls or the needs of those girls at risk of marriage, unless they do so deliberately and in a planned manner.

Dedicated and well-resourced efforts are needed to make the needs of married girls a priority in health and development efforts. For example, examining the unique circumstances of married girls and tailoring specific interventions accordingly, with measurable targets and indicators, could strengthen maternal health and family planning programmes. Maternal health programmes should also develop effective outreach strategies to draw in girls from remote and isolated communities, girls who are pregnant for the first time, and to help girls access comprehensive antenatal care, prepare for and utilize delivery services, and to ensure they return for post-partum and infant care. The goal must be to promote the rights of girls, to help families including in-laws understand the dangers of early and frequent childbearing, and to make it culturally acceptable for married girls to delay childbearing and use family planning.

Programmes should provide for safe spaces and other social platforms for married girls to gain access to peer support, critical information (including on sexual and reproductive health and HIV), develop life skills and engage in livelihood programmes. Programmes should also advocate for policies calling for compliance with the legal age of 18 for both spouses and that steps that ensure both the bride and groom have given their free, prior and full consent, as set out in the ICPD Programme of Action and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.⁵⁶

Invest in efforts to improve data on monitoring and evaluation in order to strengthen programmes for girls at risk and married girls.

Data collection systems such as the Demographic Health Surveys (DHS) and Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) should collect sufficient and appropriate data to inform public policy

and decision-making processes that aim to end child marriage including data on cultural and social practices that embed child marriage such as gender based violence. Efforts are also needed in the development of further analysis of the determinants of child marriage (demographic, cultural, social and economic factors) to better inform policies and programmes and to strengthen the evidence base and programmatic linkages with education, health, and poverty reduction. Under-researched areas such as the experience, needs and concerns of girls in humanitarian situations require greater attention. Further research is also needed to evaluate and document programmatic approaches to end child marriage and mitigate the impact on married girls which might serve as examples for other countries in similar conditions.

CONCLUSION

This report describes the cost and consequences of child marriage. While arguably child marriage does close certain options for boys, the data make it clear that child marriage is first and foremost a threat to girls and, then when realised, a breach of girls' fundamental human rights. The evidence is clear: for girls, marriage too soon of the too young brings negative impacts on girls' rights to education and health, to life opportunities and indeed, to life itself. For the sake of the more than 142 million girls at risk of this human rights abuse over the next decade, it is high time to end child marriage.

However, this report reveals that globally, rates of child marriage have not much altered in the recent past. Across continents and in the regions of the developing world, child marriage occurs at high rates bringing the gravest consequences for the poorest, the least educated and those living in rural and isolated areas. There is evidence of some small shifts of prevalence in a handful of countries, in a few areas, and for some age groups, notably girls under 15. However, the pace and reach of change is neither fast nor far enough.

Setting to one side for just a moment, the matter of the human suffering involved, it is simply true that the world can ill afford to squander the well-being, talents and contributions of the 39,000 girls who are married each day. It is time to end child marriage, simply for the sake of those who are subjected to it. Yet, the costs of inaction extend far beyond the price paid by girls themselves. The costs of inaction, in terms of rights unrealized, foreshortened personal potential and lost development opportunities, far outweigh the costs of interventions. It is time to end child marriage, also for the sake of families, communities and countries.

Promising interventions and strategic policy choices are available to avert this human tragedy of child marriage and put girls on another path instead: a path for prosperity, progress and peace. Investments targeting support for married girls and interventions that reduce vulnerability to early marriage for the poorest, least educated and rural or isolated girls are investments in social justice and human rights, producing benefits for the individual, their families and for generations to come. Such investments are a sure and certain means by which to turn the tides of gender inequality, illiteracy, adolescent pregnancies, and the associated rates of maternal mortality and morbidity. In today's demographic realities, reducing child marriage, delaying pregnancies and securing the rights of young women to education can also help offset population momentum.

Bringing an end to child marriage, therefore, is a matter of national priorities and political will. It requires effective legal frameworks that protect the rights of the children involved and it requires enforcement of those laws in compliance with human rights standards. It requires the engagement and support of families and communities who, when they do stand up for their daughters and granddaughters, will win change in otherwise longstanding but harmful social norms and traditions. Most of all, it requires the empowerment of girls themselves; empowerment so that girls are positioned to make decisions at the right time; empowered so that, exercising free and informed consent, girls can make the decisions that will safeguard their own futures, transform their own lives and enable them to live in the dignity to which they, as human beings, are entitled.

ENDNOTES

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- 27 Data for East Asia and the Pacific represent only 27 per cent of the region's population. No data were available for China.
- 28 Including La Paz, Pando, Chuquisaca and Beni.
- 29 Ranging from 10 to 16 years of age.
- 30 UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2010, *Out-of-School Adolescents*, Montreal, Canada.
- 31 UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2010, pp. 9-10.
- 32 The total demand for contraception is obtained by adding to the contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR) the unmet need rate for contraception (UNR). The proportion of demand for contraception satisfied (PDS) is obtained as: $PDS = CPR / (CPR + UNR) * 100$.
- 33 These estimates do not include women 20-24 who die before age 20 and could be underestimates of number of women 20-24 years of age who married before age 18 if the levels of mortality are higher for these group of women than the one observed for those marrying after age 18.
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