

RESEARCH REPORT

UNTYING THE KNOT

Exploring Early Marriage
in Fragile States



Acknowledgements

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Cover image: Girls attending a school founded in 2009 and funded by World Vision in Bangladesh. A study by the Government of Bangladesh found that, as a result of the closure of many schools following Cyclone Sidr in 2007, it became 'very common' for adolescent girls to be forced into marriage without their consent.
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Our child safeguarding policy prevents us from showing the faces of any girls affected by early marriage. All images used were taken with permission from similar contexts and are not linked to the specific stories in this report. All quotes from research respondents displayed in this report were given anonymously and are attributable by gender, age and location only.

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World Vision UK

World Vision House, Opal Drive,
Fox Milne, Milton Keynes, MK15 0ZR
www.worldvision.org.uk

World Vision UK – London office

11 Belgrave Road,
London, SW1V 1RB

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Abbreviations and acronyms

ADAPT	Analysis, Design and Programming Toolkit
CAR	Central African Republic
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CHW	Community health worker
DFID	Department for International Development
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
FGMA	FGM abandonment
FGM/C	Female genital mutilation/cutting
FSI	Failed States Index
HDI	Human Development Index
HMG	Her Majesty's Government
IPSCAN	International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army (Uganda)
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MoH	Ministry of Health
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MNCH	Maternal, newborn and child health
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RMNH	Reproductive, maternal and newborn health
RoSS	Republic of South Sudan
ttC	Timed and Targeted Counselling
UN	United Nations
UNCRC	UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WHO	World Health Organisation
WRI	World Risk Index

Foreword

Tying the knot: an expression that for most of us evokes happy memories of one of the best days of our lives. However, the fun of planning the wedding and the heady excitement of the first weeks of marriage will not be the experience of 13.5 million girls this year. Instead, fearing threats, and encouraged or coerced into marriage as a means of protection, nearly one-in-three girls in developing countries will marry before the age of 18.

The younger the girl, the more harmful the consequences: I have seen girls as young as eight being married off to men decades older than them. The impact of sexual activity on children who are too young can be catastrophic. Children having children continues to be a common phenomenon across the developing world, with deaths caused by early pregnancy and birth complications the biggest cause of mortality for girls aged 15–19. Beyond the physical harm they face, is the complete loss of childhood. Children who marry do not play with their friends, are often not attending school, do not have access to opportunities for their future, and are confined within roles which bring responsibilities that they did not choose and often do not understand.

This report unravels the links between fragility and early marriage. By showing how marriage is used as a perceived means of 'protection' for girls, this report is a unique contribution to the evidence base of factors driving early marriage prevalence. Revealing the complex causes of this harmful practice, World Vision also identifies key actions that can be taken, both globally and by the UK Government, to reduce the stress on communities and provide families with alternative, effective means of really protecting their daughters.

Last year I travelled to Niger, where more than 75% of the country's children marry before their eighteenth birthday. I met 12-year-old Zainab who fled home with her grandmother to escape being a child bride, having seen her big sister die in childbirth after an early marriage. This report tells of more girls – Faiza, Hanatou and Habon – whose stories reflect the experiences of millions of girls in need of protection and help today.

Our vision is that every child – no matter where they are born – can live life to the full, and have hope and a future. For more than 20 years we have been working to protect and rebuild the lives of children affected by violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect.

Our hope is that this report contributes to the evidence needed to protect girl brides from the harm of early marriage, and prevent the practice from affecting millions more in the decades to come.



Justin Byworth
Chief Executive Officer



Member of a child forum supported by World Vision in Bangladesh. Many of the girls we spoke to in Bangladesh reported that girls who are married are often taken away from their families, friends and communities, and forced into social isolation without access to support networks that might help them to cope with the physical and emotional challenges of marriage. ©2012 Lipy Mary Rodrigues/World Vision

Methodology

This report is based on primary evidence gathered by World Vision staff in Bangladesh, Somaliland¹ and Niger and a literature review. Each country was chosen according to their prevalence of early marriage and level and nature of fragility. The research focused in particular on girls who marry below the age of 15, when the consequences of early marriage are most harmful.

Research was undertaken between July and September 2012 through more than 50 focus group discussions with various stakeholder groups. These included girls under the age of 16 – some married, others not – boys under the age of 16, women and mothers over the age of 25, men and fathers, and religious and traditional community leaders. Male and female researchers were deployed to work with their corresponding groups, to ensure no men were present throughout the discussions with girls and women, and vice versa. The age, marital status, number of children and age at which each respondent was married were recorded at the end of each group discussion. No names or other means of identifying individuals were recorded and all case studies in this report have been presented under pseudonyms. Each group was chosen at random from communities with high incidences of early marriage, across both urban and rural areas and in contexts with differing levels and causes of fragility. Within each country context there were three sites of research.

The focus group discussions used participatory methodologies to document the experiences and opinions of the respondents in each group. The methodology included the use of drawing, mapping, diagrams and games. The use of drawing and diagrams prompted a more confident response across the groups, particularly from children. World Vision national staff and translators were trained in the use of these research methods and were involved in determining guide questions for each group set. The terminology of these guide questions altered slightly depending on the context, but remained consistent across all three countries in the topics and issues addressed. World Vision national staff translated the responses, and then through a group process of evaluation reviewed the findings with the child protection and health staff who live and work in the community areas.

Over 30 key informant interviews were also conducted during the same period, with international NGOs, UN agencies, national NGOs, national and local level government officials, Department for International Development (DFID) in-country offices, child protection community committees, hospital staff and religious leaders. Existing literature from both academic and NGO sources was reviewed and is presented within the report to provide alternative or supplementary examples. Additional evidence – including reports and assessments, case studies, stories and statistics – was provided by World Vision International programmes and experience across a broad spectrum of least developed countries and fragile states.²

¹ World Vision works in Somaliland, Puntland and South Central Somalia. For security reasons, this research was conducted only in Somaliland.

² World Vision is a federal partnership, founded in 1950 and working in almost 100 countries worldwide.

Defining early marriage and fragile contexts

Early marriage

World Vision UK uses the term 'early marriage' to refer to any marriage where one or both spouses are under the age of 18. We recognise that terminology varies in the sector, and that the term child marriage may be interchangeable. However, in contexts where the 'age of childhood' has varying definitions, incidences of marriage involving older adolescents may not be seen as child marriage. Early marriage then becomes a useful term to capture what we believe to be the premature nature of these marital unions.

Early marriage is also sometimes referred to as forced marriage, because children rarely consent freely, or understand the long-term implications of marrying young. Children may be coerced by their families to marry, or choose marriage themselves if they believe it will make their lives better. Forced marriage also occurs between adults. For these reasons we use the term early marriage.

Although boys also enter into early marriage, girls are disproportionately affected and form the majority of child spouses. The younger the child, the greater the danger that marriage poses to their health and well-being. Seventeen per cent of girls in least developed countries are married by their fifteenth birthday and consequently suffer a range of acute negative physical and psychological impacts due to their immaturity.

International human rights instruments provide four main protections against early marriage. They:

1. Require the intending parties to exercise 'free and full consent' in the decision to marry
2. Set the minimum age of marriage at 18, the upper limit of childhood as defined by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)
3. Call on states to 'ban harmful practices,' including early marriage
4. Entitle children to special protections, including the right to express their views freely in all matters regarding their welfare; the right to education on the basis of equal opportunity; the right to protection from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, maltreatment or exploitation; and the right to health and access to health services.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that marriage shall be entered into only with the 'free and full consent of the intending spouses,' while the Committee established under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women recommends that marriage should not be permitted before minors 'have attained full maturity and capacity to act'.

Fragile states

Fragile states are those where a government cannot or will not act on its responsibility to protect and fulfil the rights of the majority of the population, particularly the most vulnerable. Basic accountability relationships between the government and citizens tend to be weak or broken, and the government is unable to provide security, public services or territorial control, or to support livelihoods. Fragility does not conform to state borders: relatively stable states may encompass fragile regions, while fragile states can also contain zones of stability and fragile areas can overlap two or more states. Fragile contexts are also those in which communities are under greater stress caused by natural disasters, acute and slow onset emergencies, civil and political conflict and insecurity. Violent instability is now most often caused by internal conflict and criminal violence rather than war between states, with many countries facing cycles of repeated violence, weak governance and instability.



ABOVE: Students in Bangladesh play in the mustard fields before class. In some countries, including Bangladesh and Malawi, stipends or cash transfer programmes have been successfully used to ensure that girls are enrolled and achieve in school, enabling them to reach their full potential and close down gender gaps in education, as well as delaying the age of marriage.. ©2013 Xavier Sku/World Vision

Executive summary

Early marriage is a brutal curtailment of childhood and a violation of children's rights. Every year, 13.5 million girls around the world marry before their eighteenth birthday. Based on current trends, 142 million girls will be married in the decade to 2020. That's an average of 14.2 million girls every year.

This report considers the ways in which current interventions by governments and the international community, including the UK, could be strengthened to ensure that the cycle of poverty and inequality created by early marriage is broken for future generations of girls.

Half of all girls living in least developed countries marry before their eighteenth birthday, while one-in-nine girls marry before they turn 15. Most of the world's child spouses live in South Asia (46%) and in West and Central Africa (41%). They tend to be poor, under-educated and living in rural areas where birth and death rates are high, where civil conflict is commonplace, and where there are lower overall levels of development including schooling and healthcare. Most of the 25 countries with the highest rates of early marriage are considered fragile states or at high risk of natural disaster, ranking highly on relevant global indexes.

Girls who live in countries facing humanitarian crises are most vulnerable, as existing social networks and protection mechanisms are disrupted, leaving them more exposed to abuse. In extreme cases, during violent conflict for example, informal community welfare networks can break down entirely, and support for the protection of children may be non-existent. Our research in Somaliland, Bangladesh and Niger found that early marriage is often perceived by families protective measure and used as a community response to crisis.

Fear of rape and sexual violence, of unwanted pre-marital pregnancies, of family shame and dishonour, of homelessness and hunger or starvation were all reported by parents and children as legitimate reasons for early marriage. Poverty, weak legislative frameworks and enforcement, harmful traditional practices, gender discrimination and lack of alternative opportunities for girls (especially education) are all major drivers of early marriage that are strengthened by the fear and anxiety symptomatic of fragile contexts. As a result, parents and girls resort to early marriage as a protection against both real and perceived risks.

The impact of marriage on the lives of girls and boys can be catastrophic, ranging from severe sexual and reproductive health complications and an increase in child mortality, to domestic violence, social isolation and extreme poverty. These impacts are further compounded in fragile contexts by weak systems and government inability to protect and fulfil the rights of its citizens. Early marriage poses a serious challenge to extremely hard-won development gains in least developed countries. And yet, in the face of these facts and the widespread condemnation of the practice, early marriage continues to flourish.

Global institutions, such as the United Nations (UN), and major donors, including the UK's DFID, have a number of policy frameworks and strategies in place that recognise early marriage as a development challenge. However, there is a major gap within existing interventions which have so far failed to recognise the role of fragility as a major driver of early marriage.

Interventions ranging from proactive legislative enforcement to community-wide mobilisation are absolutely critical if early marriage is to be ended within our lifetime. Systems of protection must also be established and strengthened around children to ensure that efforts to prevent early marriage have the best chance of long-term success. Attractive, viable alternatives to early marriage need to be made available to girls and their families and mainstreamed into humanitarian and emergency responses. In line with efforts to mobilise communities to address early marriage, tackling its root causes also requires behavioural change to undermine damaging and discriminatory practices and prevent them recurring in the future. This study argues that the UK Government can do more to tackle early marriage by:

- **Demonstrating global leadership in committing to ending early marriage by 2030**
- **Prioritising early marriage in the UK Government's Human Rights Agenda**
- **Ensuring early marriage prevention is part of UK emergency and humanitarian responses**
- **Addressing harmful practices comprehensively**
- **Including early marriage prevention into education, maternal health and other programmes to prevent early marriage and support girls who are already married.**

The UK has a key role to play to ensure the success of the movement to end early marriage within our lifetime.

Introduction

What is early marriage?

Every year, 13.5 million girls marry before their eighteenth birthday.³

If current early marriage trends continue, 142 million girls worldwide will be married this decade (2011–2020), an average of 14.2 million each year.⁴ This could rise to a staggering 15.1 million girls marrying every year from 2021 to 2030.⁵

One-in-three girls is currently affected around the developing world, including nearly half of all girls living in least developed countries.⁶ One-in-nine girls is made to marry before her fifteenth birthday.⁷

Most of these girls live in South Asia, where 46% of women are married before their eighteenth birthday, and in West and Central Africa where the figure is as high as 41%.⁸ The percentage of boys in these regions who are married between the ages of 15 and 19 years is much lower, at less than 5%.⁹ Large variations can be found within regions and from country to country.¹⁰ However, girls who marry very young tend to be poor, under-educated and living in rural areas.¹¹ Girls who are living in countries facing humanitarian crises are most vulnerable.¹² As social networks and protection frameworks are destroyed or disrupted by crises, parents often sincerely believe that marriage safeguards their daughters; they may also use marriage as a strategy to secure income in desperate economic times.

“In South Asia, nearly one in every three adolescent girls aged 15-19 is married or in union, compared to 1 in 14 in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS).”

Source: UNICEF (2012a) p. 8

Marriage is a violation of children's rights and a brutal curtailment of childhood. It forces girls and boys into responsibilities for which they lack the emotional and physical maturity. The impact of marriage on the lives of girls and boys can be catastrophic, ranging from severe sexual and reproductive health complications and high infant or child mortality, to domestic violence, social isolation and extreme poverty. Early marriage also poses a serious challenge to hard-won development gains in least developed countries. Yet in the face of these facts and widespread condemnation of the practice, early marriage continues to flourish.

³ UNFPA, 2012, p. 44.

⁴ These estimates do not include women 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; (Ibid, p.59, note 33.)

⁵ Ibid, p. 44.

⁶ Girls marrying before the age of 18 in developing countries(excluding China) UNICEF, 2012a, pp. 8-10. 'Least developed countries' are classified as such by the UN and are as follows: Afghanistan; Angola; Bangladesh; Benin; Bhutan; Burkina Faso; Burundi; Cambodia; CAR; Chad; Comoros; Democratic Republic of the Congo; Djibouti; Equatorial Guinea; Eritrea; Ethiopia; Gambia; Guinea; Guinea-Bissau; Haiti; Kiribati; Lao People's Democratic Republic; Lesotho; Liberia; Madagascar; Malawi; Mali; Mauritania; Mozambique; Myanmar; Nepal; Niger; Rwanda; Samoa; Sao Tome and Principe; Senegal; Sierra Leone; Solomon Islands; Somalia; South Sudan; Sudan; Timor-Leste; Togo; Tuvalu; Uganda; United Republic of Tanzania; Vanuatu; Yemen; Zambia. Ibid, p. 52.

⁷ Ibid, Table 9, p. 123.

⁸ Ibid, Table 9, p. 123.

⁹ UNICEF, 2012a, p. 8.

¹⁰ In West Africa, for instance, Mali has an early marriage rate of 55%, while in Cape Verde it stands at 18% (married before 18 years) (UNICEF, 2012b, Table 9).

¹¹ UNFPA, 2012, p. 6.

¹² Ibid, p. 12.

FIGURE I Twenty five countries with highest rates of women 20–24 years old who were first married or in union before they were 15 years old and before they were 18 years old.¹³

Rank	25 Countries with highest early marriage rates	Percentage married before 15	Percentage married before 18
1	Niger	36%	75%
2	Chad	35%	72%
3	Bangladesh	32%	66%
4	Guinea	20%	63%
5	Central African Republic (CAR)	21%	61%
6	Mali	15%	55%
7	Mozambique	17%	52%
8	Nepal	10%	51%
9	Malawi	9%	50%
10	Ethiopia	24%	49%
11	Sierra Leone	19%	48%
12	Madagascar	14%	48%
13	Burkina Faso	5%	48%
14	Eritrea	20%	47%
15	India	18%	47%
16	Uganda	12%	46%
17	Somalia	8%	45%
18	Zambia	9%	42%
19	Nicaragua	10%	41%
20	Dominican Republic	14%	40%
21	Nigeria	17%	39%
22	Honduras	11%	39%
23	Senegal	10%	39%
24	Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)	8%	39%
25	Afghanistan	No Data	39%

Rates of early marriage tend to be high where poverty, birth and death rates are high; where civil conflict is commonplace; and where there are lower overall levels of development, including schooling, healthcare and employment.¹⁴ Children living in disaster-prone or fragile states, such as Niger or Somalia, are more likely to marry young. War, extreme poverty, recurrent natural disasters, political volatility, migration, displacement and unreliable economic conditions create fear and anxiety that leaves children particularly exposed to abuse and exploitation.

Getting to grips with early marriage in fragile contexts is becoming more pressing than ever: around the world, 1.5 billion – or one-in-four – people currently live in fragile contexts.¹⁵ A growing number of these people are living in extreme poverty.¹⁶ Children and youth make up a large proportion of the demographic in fragile contexts, often at least 50% of affected populations.¹⁷

¹³ DHS/MICS data in UNICEF 2012b.

¹⁴ UNFPA, 2005.

¹⁵ World Bank, 2011.

¹⁶ Chandy and Gertz, 2011. 30% of Official Development Assistance (ODA) is spent in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. See also OECD's New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States launched at Busan Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness 2011 www.oecd.org/international%20dialogue/anewdealforenagementinfragilestates.htm

¹⁷ Ashdown 2011 p. 29.

Our research found that insecurity, distress and fear make early marriage seem like a refuge for many families wanting to safeguard their daughters. Slow onset emergencies, such as the current food insecurity in the Sahel or protracted conflicts in DRC, Afghanistan or Northern Uganda, force parents to consider various means of protection, as concern for the well-being and safety of their daughters and the wider family grows.

‘When the poverty here gets worse, we see an increase in young girls getting married.’ *Woman over 25, Somaliland*

Multiple and drawn-out shocks have a cumulative effect on people, eroding their capacity to cope. The absence of social protection and the breakdown of informal protection and welfare networks in fragile states make children, their families and communities less secure, less resilient to adverse events and more vulnerable to the extremes of poverty. In the face of these threats, parents actively encourage (and, in some cases, coerce) their girls to marry at a very young age, believing this to offer them the best protection. In a cruel irony, the already negative health and psycho-social consequences of early marriage are exacerbated by the poor conditions and inadequate support systems that characterise fragile contexts, making girls in those settings particularly vulnerable.

Most of the 25 countries with the highest rates of early marriage are considered fragile states or at high risk of natural disaster, ranking highly on relevant global indexes (Failed States Index (FSI)¹⁸ and World Risk Index (WRI)¹⁹). Almost all of the 25 countries have extremely low rates of human development.²⁰ Our data shows that states scoring highly on an average of FSI and WRI are significantly more likely to have high proportions of girls married before the age of 18 (see Figure 2). Although this correlation between fragility or risk and early marriage is not directly causative, our research in communities and anecdotal evidence from our long-term programming supports the notion of fragility being a key contributing factor to higher rates of early marriage.

Global institutions, such as the UN, and major donors, including the UK's DFID, have a number of policy frameworks and strategies in place that recognise early marriage as a development challenge. However, there is a major gap within existing interventions which have so far failed to recognise the role of fragility as a major driver of early marriage.

This report considers the ways in which fragility creates fear within families and communities, the consequences this has for young girls, and how current interventions by governments and the international community, including the UK, could be strengthened to ensure that the cycle of poverty and inequality created by early marriage is broken for future generations of girls.

¹⁸ The FSI is an annual collaboration between the US Foreign Policy Centre and Fund for Peace. See: www.foreignpolicy.com/failed_states_index_2012_interactive. The FSI assesses 177 countries according to social, political and economic indicators demonstrating vulnerability and stability. Common indicators include a state where central government is so weak or ineffective that it has little practical control over much of its territory; where there is non-provision of public services, widespread corruption and criminality, refugees and involuntary movement of populations and sharp economic decline.

¹⁹ The WRI was released for the first time in September 2011 by the UN University Institute for Environment and Human Security. The WRI takes into account social, political, economic and ecological factors to determine the capacity of an affected community to respond when disaster strikes. It looks at four main components which take into account at least 28 variables. The four components are Exposure to Natural Hazard, Susceptibility, Capacity to Cope, and Adaptation Strategies. The five countries most vulnerable to risk are Afghanistan, Niger, Chad, Sierra Leone and Eritrea – all of which have high early marriage rates. See UNU, 2011.

²⁰ For example, Niger ranks 186, Chad 183, Bangladesh 146, Guinea 178, and CAR 179 on the Human Development Index (HDI).

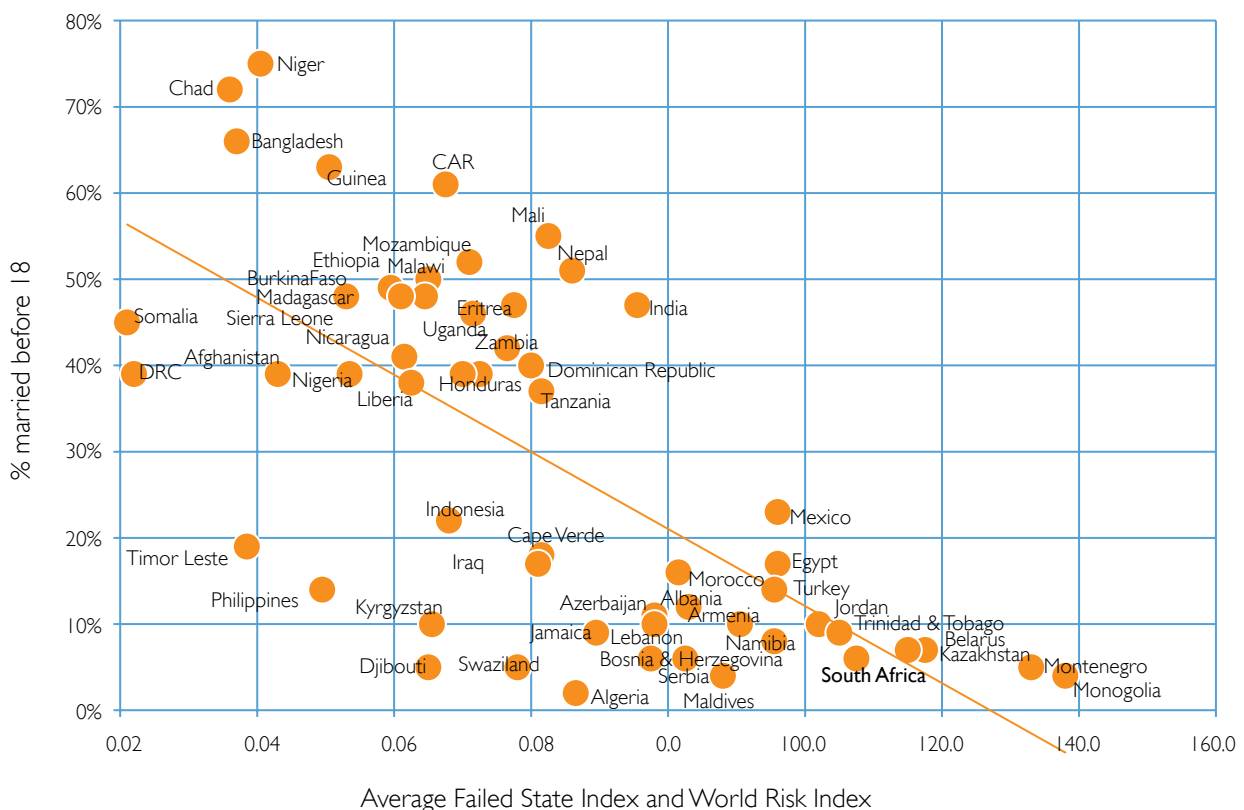
MAPPING CHILD PROTECTION ISSUES IN FRAGILE CONTEXTS

World Vision is working to address the impact of fragility on the lives of children in many of the world's most fragile states. World Vision uses a child protection tool called ADAPT – Analysis, Design and Programming Toolkit – to map the protection systems at the national level. The process starts with collecting children's views on abuse, neglect, exploitation or other forms of violence that children are experiencing in the community. ADAPT then uses desk reviews of relevant child policies and legislation, research papers and reports, system mapping reports where available, and key informant interviews to build a picture of the prevalence of child protection issues, as well as the strengths and gaps of the protection system in every context. Participatory methodologies are used in communities, as well as focus group discussions, creative workshop activities, community conversations and key informant interviews.

World Vision UK conducted ADAPT training in four fragile states between 2011 and 2012, with funding support from the UK DFID. The mapping processes in Afghanistan, Somaliland and South Sudan all identified early and forced marriage as a priority child protection issue. Issues arising in DRC included sexual violence and exploitation, and three of the four contexts noted the lack of birth registration as an additional child protection issue.

Source: World Vision UK, Community-based Child Protection Mapping Assessments, 2011-2012

FIGURE 2 The percentage of women married before the age of 18 in fragile countries

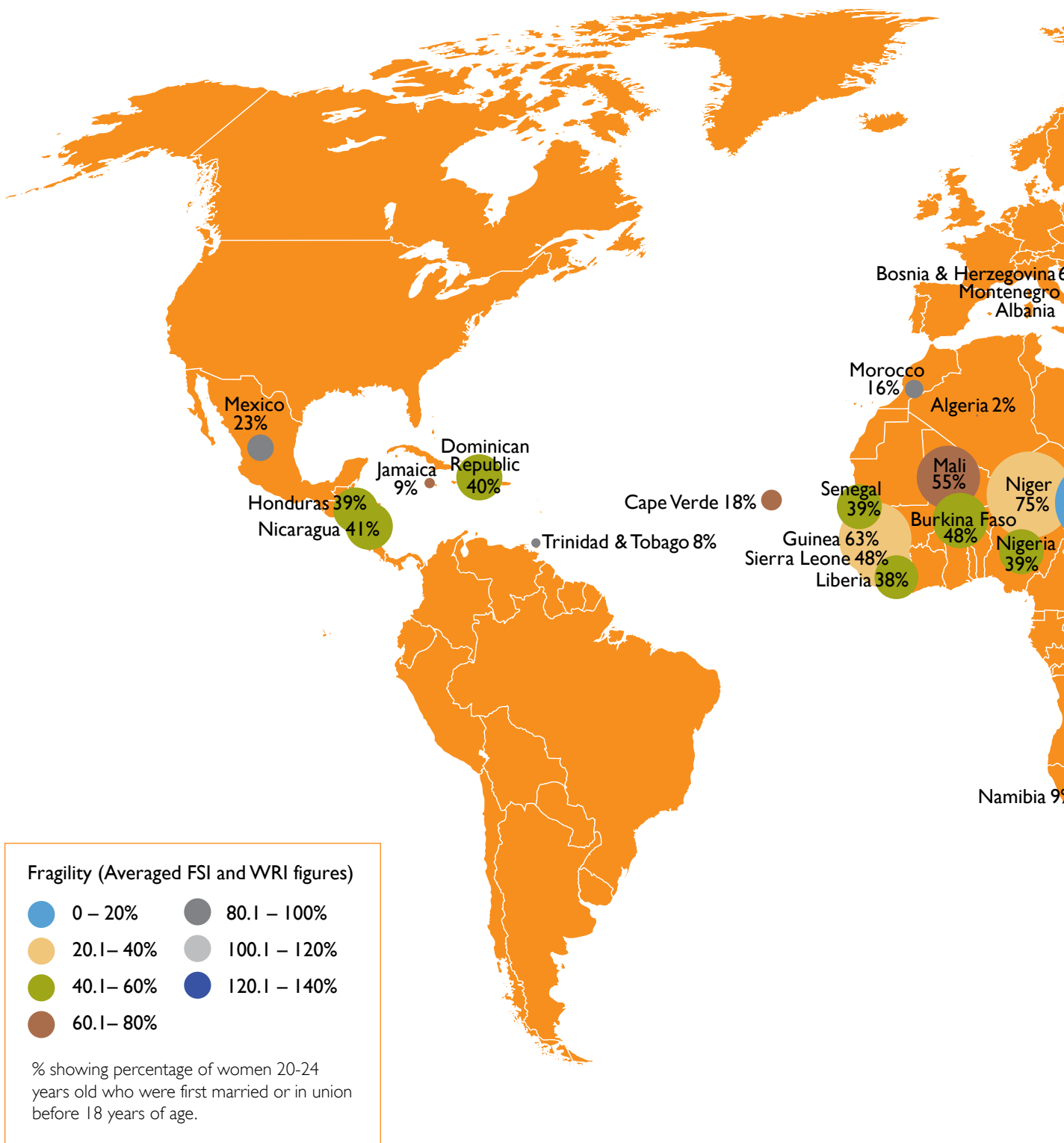




Women in Somaliland walk home after their weekly check-up and ration of plumpynut from a World Vision funded clinic.
© 2012 Ashley Jonathan Clements/World Vision

FIGURE 3 Countries according to fragility and prevalence of early marriage

Source: GCD Start With A Girl Briefing Paper 2009²¹



²¹ Centre for Global Development (2009) Start with a Girl: A New Agenda for Global Health www.cgdev.org/files/1422899_file_Start_with_a_Girl_FINAL.pdf.



CAUSES OF FRAGILITY

- Severe and prolonged flash flooding
- Drought
- Chronic food insecurity
- Internal displacement and refugee populations
- Internal conflict and civil war
- Armed rebellion and violent protest
- Political instability, coups, elections, and ongoing tension
- Cross-border unrest and violent conflict
- High levels of corruption
- Long history of authoritarian rule
- High levels of poverty and strain on available resources and services
- Aid dependence
- Collapse of state control
- Cyclones, earthquakes, tsunamis and typhoons

Source: World Vision UK Source: World Vision UK

Fear in fragile contexts: a major cause of early marriage

Our research found that early marriage is often deployed as a response to crisis, considered by families and communities to be the best possible means of protecting children. Fear of rape and sexual violence, of unwanted pregnancies outside marriage, of family shame and dishonour, of homelessness and hunger or starvation were all reported by parents and children as legitimate reasons for early marriage in Somaliland, Bangladesh and Niger.

A complex web of factors contributes to high early marriage prevalence which cannot be solely attributed to the fragility of the contexts in which these young people live. Poverty, weak legislative frameworks and enforcement, harmful traditional practices, gender discrimination and lack of alternative opportunities for girls (especially education) are all major drivers of early marriage. However, during our research communities repeatedly told us that the fragility of their environment breeds particular fears and anxieties that cause parents and girls to resort to early marriage as a protection against risk (whether real or perceived).

Fear of defying customary practice

Customary, religious and formal laws

Reluctance to go against traditional practice can be considered stronger in contexts of fragility, where customary law is often the only consistent source of authority. Families living in unstable societies often choose to minimise risk by adhering to social norms and behavioural codes laid down at community level. However, customary laws and harmful practices often have adverse outcomes for girls, even when presumed to be in the 'best interests' of the child.

'If you keep a daughter in your home up to the age of 18 and she is not in school, people will wonder what is wrong with her.' *A group of religious and community leaders, Niger*

In fragile contexts, state justice systems often lack legitimacy and there may be gaps and differences between formal and customary laws and practice. Recognising customary laws and practice over and above state or international law, communities establish or reinforce existing behavioural and gender norms which may not be conducive to child protection. Fear of the negative consequences of transgressing these norms – social stigma, isolation and informal penalties – ensure that early marriage continues to thrive in some contexts and is often seen as a respectable tradition endowed with social prestige.

COLLABORATION WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES ON EARLY MARRIAGE

In northern Ethiopia, World Vision is supporting community advocacy initiatives which seek to change and challenge local attitudes. Local community groups conduct sensitisation and awareness campaigns on child rights, report and initiate legal proceedings against parents who offer their children in marriage, and work closely with the child protection unit within the police force to bring criminal offenders to justice. In the Lebo Kem Kem district, for example, as a result of one community group's efforts, 155 planned early marriages in one period were cancelled, several parents have been accused in local courts and two matchmakers (who have a vested social or financial interest in the practice) were prosecuted, fined and given a five-year prison sentence.

Almost every country in the world has domestic legislation in place to prevent early marriage and has signed or ratified a range of international conventions condemning the practice.²² Bangladesh, for example, has had laws in place to prevent early marriage since 1929.²³ Legislation is rarely enforced in fragile states, however, and has proven ineffective in relation to early marriage. Parents and communities prefer to follow customary practices that carry shame if defied.

‘If a woman reaches 25 without a man, she becomes called ‘goon’, meaning an old woman, or one that the man does not want.’ *Woman over 25, Somaliland*

The existence of parallel, multiple formal and informal legal systems is commonplace in fragile contexts. Civil law – which is often outdated and inadequate – customary law and religious law may exist simultaneously and may be governed or administered separately by traditional leaders, religious leaders and government officials. Women’s and children’s rights often remain subject to community mediation which is outside of formal justice and social welfare systems. Early marriage and other harmful practices are seen as protective, from an informal, community perspective, and changes made to national laws thus have no real traction on the ground.²⁴ The existence of discrepancies and multiple versions of laws in a single country, as well as draft laws, hinders enforcement. State law enforcers may also be ill-informed, poorly trained and inadequately equipped to carry out their duties. Communities understandably fall back on more reliable customary laws and practices in these circumstances.

In Somaliland, the law does not yet define a concrete, minimum age for marriage. This has led to discrepancies in the perceived age of marriage and has encouraged reliance on religious teachings that have been interpreted in very different ways. Depending on the school of Islamic law being followed, some argue that the correct age for girls to marry is ‘maturity’, which can be as young as nine or ten years old, while others argue that the minimum age is 15.²⁵ Similarly, in Niger, a draft early marriage law is being widely debated by a range of stakeholders, while religious and traditional law which sanctions early marriage for girls continues to be followed.

Working with customary practices

‘WorldVision has extensive experience of working with communities on traditional customary practices, seeking to enforce the positive whilst sensitively challenging the negative using a variety of tools for social transformation developed from the “community conversation” approach. In Sierra Leone, for example, WorldVision is partnering with “Sowies” who are the custodians of traditional practice including FGM/C [female genital mutilation/cutting] to bring an end to this particularly harmful practice.’

Source: Ware (2012)

Weak penalties for those who knowingly promote early marriage, combined with lack of will and lack of capacity to enforce legislation, mean that there is no real compulsion to obey statutory law in fragile contexts.²⁶ Sanctions on bride price designed to reduce early marriages in Niger, for example, are disregarded as meaningless. In Bangladesh, informants reported that penal sanctions for parents and those who engage in or solemnise an early marriage are so minor as to be insignificant.

²² The exceptions are Palau, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and The Gambia. See Annexe 1 for a list of country ratifications of relevant human rights instruments and official legal age of marriage.

²³ The Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929; see Box 5 for further detail.

²⁴ UNICEF 2012c, p. 6 notes that ‘this is an almost universal feature of child protection services in west and central Africa’.

²⁵ Note that throughout our research in Somaliland, focus groups repeatedly emphasised that very young girls who are betrothed are usually kept within the family home until menstruation begins or they reach the age of 12. It is only after puberty that girls are expected to engage in a full sexual relationship with their spouse

²⁶ For discussion of ‘negative partnerships’ that enable collusion between key stakeholders and prevent law enforcement in fragile contexts see Ware, 2012. .



ABOVE: Women and the elders from the Abdille Gab village in Dadaab Refugee Camp tell how their dream of making education available to their children is made possible by the twice-weekly delivery of clean drinking water by World Vision. Girls in Somaliland told us that they will likely get married if they can no longer go to school, as it is considered the best means of protecting a young girl and her honour. ©2011 Jon Warren/World Vision

“When my father told me I was going to be married off, I felt my life had been ruined. All my dreams were shattered.” *Girl under 16, Bangladesh*

It is therefore vital that initiatives that seek to tackle early marriage prevalence not only work to improve legal frameworks, but focus on strengthening the informal elements of a protection system, such as building public awareness and open dialogue, particularly in fragile states.

Unwillingness to enforce laws often involves collusion between state officials, religious leaders and communities who freely offer and accept bribes to enable early marriages to proceed. In Bangladesh, for example, people ranging from religious leaders to parents and district officials told us that the lack of birth registration enables the ages of couples to be easily falsified and for duty bearers to turn a blind eye.²⁷ Proof of a child's age is a prerequisite, not only to the effective enforcement of legislation, but to further the capacity of children to claim their rights. During our research in Bangladesh, electronic birth registration was regularly cited by informants as an effective tool to prevent early marriage. The same was said in Niger and Somaliland: women repeatedly emphasised the importance of proof of age as a means of delaying marriage, where civil law includes an age of consent.

²⁷UNICEF 2011 p. 10. Findings of World Vision staff in Ethiopia were similar; since only 7% of children under five have been registered at birth.

PROMOTING BIRTH REGISTRATION

World Vision works to increase birth registration awareness and levels in the community by including it in existing programme interventions, such as health and child participation activities. World Vision is also supporting government capacity to improve access to birth registration services for the most vulnerable communities. World Vision works through birth clinics, children and youth clubs, local leaders, women's groups and child parliaments, amongst other means, to provide access to registration services and promote the importance of birth registration, including late birth registration. In the DRC, World Vision also partners local government to support the registration of newborns in their first three months, through raising awareness within communities and supporting accountability of service providers.

The disregard for formal judicial systems described above, and the inaccessibility of legal systems for many girls, also impact on girls' ability to seek justice when they have been made to marry against their will. In Niger and Somaliland, the threat of shame for communities that 'fail' to protect girls through their own judicial processes also means that girls may fear the shame of seeking state assistance even where it is available.

BANGLADESH LEGISLATION

The Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929 was amended by Ordinance in 1984 so that the minimum ages of marriage are 21 for men and 18 for women.²⁸ The legislation provides penal sanctions for those who knowingly participate in the contracting of an under-age marriage, but does not invalidate such marriages.²⁹

Current sanctions are a fine of Taka 1,000 (approx. \$12 at current exchange rates) and one month imprisonment for men who marry under 21, for those who solemnise the marriage, for parents or guardians. No woman is punishable by imprisonment under the Act.³⁰

Justice must be swiftly sought in Bangladesh regarding early marriage. More than a year from the day of the marriage, the court will not consider early marriage as an offence. The Act states, 'No Court shall take cognizance of any offence under this Act after the expiry of one year from the date on which the offence is alleged to have been committed'.

Under the Act, an injunction can be issued by a magistrate if they have evidence that an early marriage is due to take place.

Dowry is also illegal in Bangladesh. The practice of giving or receiving dowry was made a punishable offence by the 1980 Dowry Prohibition Act. The penalties for giving or demanding dowry are much harsher than those under the Child Marriage Act and are as follows:

'Penalty for giving dowry: If any person, after the commencement of this Act, gives or takes or abets the giving or taking of dowry, he shall be punishable with imprisonment which may extend to five years and shall not be less than one year, or with fine, or with both.'

Penalty for demanding dowry: 'If any person, after the commencement of this Act, demands, directly or indirectly, from the parents or guardian of a bride or bridegroom, as the case may be, any dowry, he shall be punishable with imprisonment which may extend to five years and shall not be less than one year, or with fine, or with both.'³¹

²⁸ See: <http://genderindex.org/country/bangladesh>, accessed 13 June 2012.

²⁹ www.law.emory.edu/ifl/legal/bangladesh.htm (2002, although said to be in draft), accessed 27 June 2012.

³⁰ See: http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/print_sections_all.php?id=149, accessed 31 July 2012.

³¹ The 1980 Dowry Prohibition Act can be found online at: www.lawyersnjurists.com/resource/legal-documentations-litigations/laws-of-bangladesh/1976-1980/the-dowry-prohibition-act-1980/, accessed 31 July 2012.



Aasiya is two years old and weighs just six kilos. She is one of five children in one family living in Somalia. Drought and other natural disasters, including flooding and cyclones, are frequently the cause of food insecurity in fragile contexts, where crops become spoiled, livestock is threatened and supply chains break down. ©2012 Daniel Lee/World Vision

Harmful traditional practices and gender norms

Traditional kinship and religious networks ensure that early marriage is seen as an unquestioned component of the social fabric which reflects patriarchal gender relations. Communities subscribe to conservative gender norms which govern behaviour and can entrench harmful practices that are linked to women's value and fears around their sexual security. These same fears also operate to enforce harmful traditional practices such as FGM/C.³²

In Somaliland, FGM/C ranges from full infibulation³³ to pricking or cutting (known as Sunna) and is closely linked to early marriage. Girls who have experienced Sunna are often considered more 'sensitive' and are therefore urged to marry young to avoid the temptations of premarital sex.

The link between FGM/C and early marriage in Somaliland:

Faiza's Story

Faiza was 15 and engaged to be married. She giggled as she talked about her wedding day, planned for just one month from now. She was embarrassed to talk about it in front of her friends – women in Somaliland are expected to conceive shortly after their wedding and Faiza was afraid that her excitement to get married would be seen as shameful. Faiza's parents had decided against her and her sisters undergoing the worst form of FGM/C and so she had experienced the Sunna form. As a result of this, she was afraid that people would think she was more likely to be sexually active at a younger age. "It is better for my dignity to have a husband and children now," she explained.

Story of girl under 16, focus group discussion, Somaliland

'There are no infibulations of the girls now, only Sunna type, so the girls have more libido.' *Woman over 25, Somaliland*

During our research, Somali girls who had not undergone infibulation reported their fears of being seen as 'undesirable', and so were keen to marry young to prove their appeal, value and respectability. This was especially the case in rural areas. Ironically, sustained campaigns which have successfully reduced FGM/C have inadvertently created a fear of 'illegal' (i.e. premarital) pregnancy, which has pushed girls in to marriage. In Somaliland, girls who have engaged in premarital sex which has led to pregnancy are mistreated by local communities as a source of shame. As a result, many single mothers often end up in urban areas, seeking work and lacking the protective network of the wider community.

'If a girl gets pregnant before she's married and the boy refuses to marry her, she goes to a new community and a new city where people don't know her.' *A woman over 25, Somaliland*

In Niger and Bangladesh, as elsewhere, girls are urged to marry young to safeguard their virginity as well as preserve their fertility. The ensuing pressure to conceive as soon as possible after marriage, even for educated urban women, highlights the need for synergy between interventions to delay first pregnancy and those to tackle early marriage.

³² FGM/C is a pervasive practice in Somalia, including in the autonomous state of Somaliland. UNICEF's State of the World's Children 2012b recording that 98% of girls and women aged 15–49 years old have been mutilated or cut. The same data exists for Niger, although at a far lower rate of 2%, whereas it is not a known practice in Bangladesh. See: www.unicef.org/sowc2012/pdfs/SOWC-2012-TABLE-9-CHILD-PROTECTION.pdf

³³ The practice of infibulation, or FGM Type 3, is defined by the WHO (2012) as the 'narrowing of the vaginal opening through the creation of a covering seal. The seal is formed by cutting and repositioning the inner, or outer, labia, with or without removal of the clitoris.'

THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY DIALOGUE IN TACKLING HARMFUL PRACTICES

In southern Senegal, a partnership between 'the Grandmother's Project' and World Vision focusing on reducing early marriage, FGM/C and early pregnancy, promotes community dialogue (including with elders and religious leaders) as the best way of encouraging positive cultural attitudes and education for girls. The openness of grandmothers to question the traditions they grew up with and engage girls in education and conversation has been fundamental to the project's success, which will impact positively, not only on their own health, but also that of future generations. When the project started the average age for marriage for girls was 15.6 years. In late 2010, the average had increased to 17.5 years, a significant achievement.³⁴

A local non-profit project supported by World Vision in South Sudan, Sports for Hope,³⁵ teaches young people about sensitive subjects such as sexual relationships, sexually-transmitted diseases and violence against women. Using sports and games, the project aims not only to give children and young people the knowledge and confidence to make decisions that are right for their lives, but also to use sport as an entry point to address sexual and gender-based violence issues in the community through creating dialogue. Sports activities and humorous games are designed to break down the stigma attached to teenage pregnancy, for example – a common cause of early marriage amongst young girls.

Source: Ware (2012)

'I was afraid even after six months of marriage when I had not got pregnant. My mother in law was asking me why.' *Woman over 25, Niger*

Likewise, it is vital that those working to tackle FGM/C recognise the need to address causes of early marriage alongside FGM/C – and vice versa – to ensure a do-no-harm approach.

Fear of immorality for girls out of school

Anxiety and fear surrounding the sexual security of girls means that girls who are not in school are more likely to be pushed into marriage to safeguard them against 'immoral' behaviour. There are myriad reasons why girls might not be in school, ranging from inaccessibility, weak infrastructure, internal and external threats of violence, to poor quality education, lack of resources and under-qualified staff. In Bangladesh in 2007, many schools remained closed in the weeks and months after Cyclone Sidr. A study by the Government of Bangladesh found that the loss of the academic year meant that it became 'very common' for adolescent girls to be forced into marriage without their consent.³⁶

A parent's choice: Hanatou's story, Niger

Hanatou did not raise her hand when asked who amongst the group of girls had chosen their husband. One of two in the group of 12 who had not, she looked embarrassed when asked for her story. She was 13 and had been married for one year. She had liked a boy in her class, she said, but he had left the village to look for work when the rains had failed and there was no harvest or money. She had wanted to wait for his return but an older, wealthier neighbour caught sight of her one day and asked her parents for permission to marry her. She couldn't say no, it was not her choice. Hanatou knew her parents were doing what they knew to be best for her. She shrugged when asked if she was happy. Happy? She was safe from the threats that face unmarried girls, and she would not go hungry.

Story of girl under 16, focus group discussion, Niger

³⁴ "Holistic Development of Girls" to reduce FGM/C, early marriage and early pregnancy implemented by World Vision Senegal with the support of the Grandmother Project.

³⁵ World Vision has been supporting Sports for Hope in South Sudan to campaign for increased dialogue and awareness of child protection issues since February 2012.

³⁶ Government of Bangladesh, 2009.

Girls we spoke to in Somaliland and Niger told us that the immediate alternative to schooling for them is marriage. Marriage ensures their respectability and safeguards their honour, both of which may be considered threatened if the girls are neither busy in school nor busy in the home.

‘You will be insulted as a girl if you are not in school and you are not married. People will think you have a bad character.’ *Girl under 16, Niger*

In Niger, girls who failed their primary certificate (mostly as a result of inexperienced teachers and limited access to books) told us that they were often married early instead of continuing their education.

Having indicators measuring the enrolment rate of girls in schools unfortunately does not mean they have equal access to quality education. In northern Nigeria, for instance, parents have complained that the quality of education is so poor that schooling cannot be considered an attractive alternative to marriage and child bearing for their daughters.³⁷

Fear of hunger and malnutrition

Drought and other natural disasters, including flooding and cyclones, are frequently the cause of food insecurity in fragile contexts, where crops become spoiled, livestock is threatened and supply chains break down. Fearing hunger and malnutrition, parents are placed under immense pressure to decide on the best allocation of resources to ensure their family’s survival.

‘When there is no food, some families give their daughters into marriage.’
Girl under 16, Somaliland

During our research, some mothers in rural Niger reported that, if faced with the opportunity to marry their young daughters off to men of wealth, they would accept the offer to enable them to care for their other children during drought. Parents in Somaliland admitted that, during periods of drought and poor harvest, the wealth of a potential spouse became the biggest factor in deciding on the marriages of their daughters. Similarly, in Bangladesh, where many in rural areas survive as tenant farmers or day labourers, whose access to paid work is regularly disrupted by severe flooding, we found that parents do their own cost-benefit analysis. Although illegal, dowry is paid for the daughter’s marriage and this one-off payment is considered an investment that frees them from providing ongoing support to girls within the family home.

Bangladeshi and Somali girls and women widely cited ‘lack of food’ and ‘drought’ as the primary reason for them being considered a ‘burden’ that must be discharged from the household, while boys are valued and retained for their labour and are considered a household asset. There is significant evidence from other countries too, including Kenya, Uganda and Afghanistan, that parents made desperate by hunger and extreme poverty are marrying off their daughters at increasingly young ages in the hope of safeguarding them from harm.³⁸

³⁷ British Council/DFID, 2012. Our research in Bangladesh showed that girls who are unable to attend school due to the various direct and indirect costs of schooling, and those whose schooling is disrupted by natural disasters such as flooding, tend to marry early. Once married, it is rare for girls to continue their education. A 2010 study by Save the Children Bangladesh found that 72% of girls drop out of secondary level education as a direct result of early marriage (key informant interview with Save the Children Bangladesh).

³⁸ See North, 2010; Deen, 2010; Callimachi, 2012.

The impact of drought on schooling in Somaliland: Habon's story

Habon is 13 years old and loves school. When asked what made her happy, she jumped up and down with excitement as she talked about her teachers, her classmates, and her lessons. When the rains failed in 2012, her family did not have the reserves to cope with another crisis, and were forced to move from their village home to the hills to find better grazing. Habon's eyes welled up as she mentioned her younger brother. Too small to cope with the lack of food, they buried him before he turned eight. Habon was scared that she would have to leave school to help her parents find food. She had already spent much of the school year caring for her family's animals and she was worried that one day soon she would not come back. Young girls who stay out of school get married early, Habon explained. If she gets married before she finishes primary school, she is unlikely to go back. Habon and her friends described the one thing they would wish for in their future. "School", they all said, without delay, "We wish we would go to school".

Story of girl under 16, focus group discussion, Somaliland

Fear of rape and sexual violence

A substantial body of evidence suggests that early marriage often increases in the immediate aftermath of conflict and natural disasters and during slow onset emergencies such as drought. Communities naturally fear for the increased insecurity brought on by the emergency, anticipating a rise in rape and sexual violence.

Following the tsunami of 2004, early marriage and other forms of sexualised violence increased in Indonesia. Families in refugee camps saw early marriage as the only protection for their daughters against the threat of rape.³⁹ After the 2010 floods in Pakistan and the earthquake in Haiti, NGO staff in both locations similarly reported increases in early marriage.⁴⁰ According to data gathered in Bangladesh, 62% of the total number of children under 18 who married in the last five years were married in the 12 months following Cyclone Sidr in 2007.⁴¹ The insecurity of camp life, combined with the lack of opportunities for girls to enter the protective school environment, meant that more adolescent girls were married.

Communities are right to fear the heightened risk of sexual violence and other forms of abuse in conflict and post-conflict situations, since women and girls **do** suffer disproportionately. Children know this too. During recent World Vision surveys in DRC and Sierra Leone, children identified sexual violence and exploitation, rooted in conflict, as the biggest threat to their protection.⁴² Adolescent girls suffer not only from the by-products of war, but have also been deliberately targeted with torture, rape, mass rape, forced prostitution, forced marriage, forced termination of pregnancy and mutilation in countries including Somalia, Afghanistan and Uganda.⁴³ Such strategies are designed to humiliate the enemy, weaken families, and break down the social fabric of communities and societies. These strategies rely on the lack of law enforcement and weak community protection structures.

In some communities affected by violent conflict and emergencies, one of the more perverse responses to the rape of girls is to ensure they are married to the perpetrator. In South Sudan, Child Protection Units within the police services in Juba report that 75% of recorded early marriage cases involve rape.⁴⁴ World Vision's research in Chad, Niger and Andean countries⁴⁵ has also found marriage deployed as a

³⁹ Feltan-Bierman, 2006.

⁴⁰ Plan, 2011.

⁴¹ World Vision UK child sponsorship data 2012.

⁴² WVUK research with World Vision Sierra Leone (Bo) and World Vision DRC (Beni) 2012.

⁴³ Human Rights Watch, 2012; World Vision US, 2008; Carlson and Mazurana, 2008. In Uganda, World Vision similarly noted a rise in early union and marriage during times of conflict, where the partners of girl children are the commanders or soldiers themselves. Initial data gathered by World Vision showed a spiked increase in 1993 and 1996. The number of female children getting married in these years was disproportionately high compared to the last five years (2007–2012), now the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) is no longer in Uganda and the conflict has decreased. The data, while representative of a limited area in Uganda, shows that the prevalence of early marriage has decreased by more than ten times in the last two decades from the early 1990s when the LRA was at its most active. ⁴⁴ Child Protection Situation Analysis carried out by Save the Children, October 2011.

protective response for rape survivors. In Somaliland, where there was a surge in rape cases in 2010,⁴⁶ religious and local leaders, parents and children informed us that marriage took place to 'protect' girls from shame.

'It is better to marry off your daughter to protect her from rape if you cannot keep her safe.' *Father, Niger*

Using marriage to protect children's lives and honour is, perhaps, unsurprising where there are no other child protection networks in place. During conflict in Sri Lanka, where early marriage incidence was relatively low, girls were married to prevent their recruitment into militia.⁴⁷ Similar reports have emerged from Afghanistan,⁴⁸ northern Uganda⁴⁹ and Somalia.⁵⁰ In Liberia and Sierra Leone, many parents facing economic destitution within the unstable, violent contexts of camp life, pushed their daughters into marriage. Some of these girls were as young as 12.⁵¹ More recently, as a result of the conflict in Syria, high rates of early marriage have been reported in Jordanian refugee camps, where parents have chosen to marry off their daughters to safeguard them from the threat of rape.⁵²

The drought currently affecting Somaliland means that girls, with no chance of attending school, are having to walk longer distances to fetch water, firewood or to look after livestock in often hazardous and insecure areas. The fear of rape is acute and is forcing many of these girls into early marriages,⁵³ with devastating consequences. In focus group discussions and interviews, adults and children repeatedly identified the threat of sexual violence as a major cause of early marriage. Fear of so-called 'illegal pregnancies' resulting from rape or from premarital sex were also cited as a key push factor.⁵⁴

THE ROLE OF KHAT IN SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN SOMALILAND

In Somaliland, evidence suggests that the perpetrators of sexual violence are often heavy users of khat, a drug with a long history in the region. Conflict and drought have caused massive increases in the use of khat. Its sale has been used to fund militia, and its use suppresses the appetite (convenient when food is scarce).⁵⁵ Those fleeing to urban centres have also taken to selling khat where job opportunities have evaporated due to war.⁵⁶

The behaviour of khat users can be erratic and antisocial, ostracising individuals from communities. It is these men that girls and women fear when they are outside the home. Refusing to put their daughters at further risk, families are choosing to marry their girls to husbands who will secure the girls' honour and keep them within the home. Indeed, girls in Somaliland reported choosing marriage themselves, because of the status and respect it confers and for the opportunity it provides for migration to urban centres, where sources of food, water and income are more secure.

Given the strong evidence presented above – that more girls are forced to marry early in conflicts and emergencies – emergency and humanitarian responses from the international community must mainstream early marriage prevention to ensure that families are offered viable alternative means of protecting their children.

⁴⁵ REDLAMYC, 2012.

⁴⁶ See <http://somalilandpress.com/somaliland-police-reveal-2010-annual-crimes-surge-in-rape-murder-19050>

⁴⁷ Kottegoda et al., 2008.

⁴⁸ UNICEF, 2010.

⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, 1997.

⁵⁰ Stockman et al., (as cited in UNICEF 2001 and World Vision US 2008).

⁵¹ UNICEF, 2005. See also, Mikhail, 2002. UNHCR Guidelines include measures such as locating latrines in well-lit areas, guarded and close to sleeping areas; providing water and firewood within the camp to limit the need for women to travel outside patrolled areas; supplying female guards.

⁵² 'Conflict Pushes Syrian Refugees to Marry Off Daughters' 23rd July 2012. www.crin.org/resources/infodetail.asp?id=29084

⁵³ Focus group discussions, August 2012, Somaliland. Also, World Vision Somaliland Community Based Child Protection Systems Assessment, unpublished paper, July 2012.

⁵⁴ World Vision Somaliland, 2012.

⁵⁵ See Oldenwald et al., 2007.

⁵⁶ Ibid.



ABOVE: A class of young students in rural Niger show off their handwriting. In Niger, girls who failed their primary certificate, mostly as a result of inexperienced teachers and limited access to books, told us that they were often married early instead of continuing their education. ©2011 Amadou Baraze/World Vision

Consequences of early marriage for girls in fragile states

Early marriage often condemns girls to a life of serious ill-health, illiteracy, chronic and often extreme poverty. Those who marry early are more likely to experience domestic violence, abuse and forced sexual relations, reduced levels of sexual and reproductive health and lower levels of education. Many of those we spoke to in Bangladesh reported that girls who are married are often taken away from their families, friends and communities, and forced into social isolation without access to support networks that might help them to cope with the physical and emotional challenges of marriage.⁵⁷

Many of the consequences of early marriage in fragile settings may be similar to those seen in less fragile contexts, but the effects are intensified by weak systems and government inability to protect and fulfil the rights of its citizens. Health, education and protection systems may have poor infrastructure, limited human resources and lack of capacity to provide appropriate support to child brides. Law enforcement and judicial systems are often too weak to protect children from illegal marriage or to provide legal redress. Vulnerable communities and individuals lack the capacity and resources to complain or to influence poor or unequal service delivery and distribution. They resort instead to reliance on customary laws, practices and protection networks, as discussed in the preceding section. In extreme cases, during violent conflict for example, informal community welfare networks can break up entirely, and support for the protection of children may be non-existent.

⁵⁷ See also Amin, 2011.

A donor focus on improving legal frameworks as a means of tackling early marriage is crucial, but must also include a focus on strengthening informal elements of protection. This might include addressing attitudes and values around child protection issues. Such an approach not only tackles the root causes of early marriage, but ensures there are strategies in place that are more resilient to fragility than some formal interventions that are reliant on state capacity.

The impact of early marriage on reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health

Early child-bearing contributes to pregnancy-related deaths and birth complications and is the leading cause of mortality for girls aged 15–19.⁵⁸ Delaying the age of marriage and addressing the root causes of early marriage are effective strategies for delaying pregnancy. Once married, girls experience intense pressure to bear children as soon as possible, to prove their fertility and their value as wives.

A girl growing up in Chad today is more likely to die in childbirth than she is to attend school.⁵⁹ Complications, such as obstructed labour, can lead to chronic disabilities including fistula. Such deaths and debilitating conditions could be averted with access to essential maternity and basic healthcare services. However, such services are weak or non-existent in many fragile contexts. Problems can be further compounded by entrenched gender inequity and discrimination that manifests in poor human and systems capacity. In Somaliland, for example, NGO workers complained during our research that girls are routinely refused medical treatment by male staff, whose attitudes towards women are so discriminatory that patients often return home without any care at all.⁶⁰ Time and again during research for this report, girls told us that their access to health and protection services was compromised or blocked because of weak state capacity.

GENDER INEQUITY IN HEALTHCARE

Gender inequality is one of the most powerful and intractable drivers of poor maternal, newborn and child health (MNCH). According to respondents who participated in research on MNCH in South Sudan, gender inequality is one of the most significant determinants of MNCH. Economic institutions relating to dowry practice feed through into very early betrothal arrangements, early-teen marriage, early and multiple pregnancy. These, along with harmful practices such as FGM/C, bring associated health risks to mothers and infants.

There is a marked absence of family planning (including very limited availability of female contraceptives and ostensibly strong cultural resistance among boys and men to male contraceptive use), and inattention to sexual health. These gaps, reinforced by a weak value cycle ascribed to girls, women, wives and mothers, expose women to repeated risk, whilst withholding decision-making power over options to mitigate such exposure, such as power over accessing basic services.

At the root, shifting household preference from dowry/marriage to extended girls' education is central to improving MNCH in South Sudan. In the long term, this will involve changing the perception of value among household decision-makers, from seeing girls as immediate means of wealth consolidation (dowry, marriage, children) to seeing them as providers of broader family welfare (education, safer motherhood, better child-rearing, greater wage employment opportunities). In the shorter term, however, a practical entry point to wider change in perceptions of gender is to advance marriage registration. Whilst this will be hard to roll out and enforce, with weak county-level administration and very high levels of rural illiteracy and innumeracy⁶¹, it could nonetheless put the issue on a formal footing through national legislation, and establish a space for public awareness and dialogue, as the basis of gradual change in practice.

Source: World Vision UK/IDL Group, 2012

⁵⁸ WHO, 2011.

⁵⁹ See <http://50.usaid.gov/infographic-saving-moms-at-birth/savingatbirth-1000/?size=infographicMedium>

⁶⁰ Key informant interviews with NGO workers in Hargeisa, Somaliland in August 2012.

⁶¹ Illiteracy is estimated to be as high as 80% among women and girls in South Sudan (Evans and Rehnstrom 2010) cited in World Vision UK/IDL Group p.16.

In rural areas of Bangladesh, community clinics often offer the only locally available health service, yet they are irregularly staffed and under-stocked, leaving girls with no alternative but to deliver babies unassisted or to walk long distances to the local hospital. Many die on the way.⁶² In Niger, communities reported to us that due to the distance to health facilities and the fact facilities were poorly equipped, many girls and women choose to deliver at home, putting themselves and their babies at considerable risk.⁶³

In Niger, we found a constant high demand for the services of a local NGO set up to meet the demand for fistula surgery and care. Dimol (meaning dignity in local language Peulh) is providing support primarily to girls suffering from fistula, with some patients as young as 12.

Globally, perinatal deaths are 50% higher among babies born to mothers under the age of 20 than among those born to mothers aged 20–29 years.⁶⁴ Babies of adolescent mothers are also more likely to be of low birth weight, with the risk of associated long-term effects.⁶⁵ Girls often lack the negotiating skills or decision-making power to secure the use of contraception, increasing their exposure to HIV and contributing to the worsening epidemic among younger women.⁶⁶ Married girls in East Africa are 75% more likely to have HIV than sexually active unmarried girls.⁶⁷ The isolation of married girls, their lack of control over when and how they have sex, and the lack of access to sexual and reproductive health services further compounds the problem. In such contexts, community health workers (CHWs), where available, become a crucial first link for these girls to essential MNCH information and to the right services. However, programme experience reveals that there are huge deficits in the number, supervision of and support for CHWs in relation to need, along with poor referral mechanisms where health systems and infrastructure tend to be fragmented, weak, of lower quality and arguably more expensive.

Universal CHW training does not currently include specific information targeting the complexities of adolescent pregnancies. According to the DFID Business Plan (May 2011)⁶⁸ UK aid will strengthen health systems and family planning facilities so that women can plan their families and receive treatment before, during and after childbirth. It is critical that this commitment provides specific support to health systems in fragile contexts, which often carry the highest burdens, so that essential MNCH services can meet the needs of women, adolescent girls and their children. World Vision is currently promoting this through its timed and targeted counselling (ttC) approach to CHW programming in Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Cambodia, Zambia, Guatemala and Kenya.

MATERNAL, NEWBORN AND CHILD HEALTH IN SOUTH SUDAN

Following Article 35 of the Interim Constitution of the Republic of South Sudan, the current reproductive, maternal and newborn health (RMNH) policy and strategy (RoSS/MoH, 2009) commit to '[e]nsuring universal access while targeting RMNH services at the most marginalized, vulnerable, disadvantaged and minority segments of the population.' (ibid. p.6). Yet in real terms, the country's RMNH policy emphasises technical capacity development over equity and community-level delivery. In the short term, RoSS/MoH policy focuses on scaling up RMNH facilities and services in 'all existing hospitals and health centres', with additional investment in new facilities to be built under the 'accelerated healthcare infrastructural development programme'. The lower level of health facilities is largely overlooked. According to the policy, priority will only be given to more remote communities ('geographical areas where no health services exist, populations living in underserved areas, pastoral communities') in the 'medium- to long-term'.

Source: World Vision UK/IDL Group, 2012

⁶² Responses during the female focus group discussions and key informant interviews in Nalitabari, Bangladesh

⁶³ In one village a group of young mothers reported that none of them had taken their babies for vaccinations.

⁶⁴ WHO, 2011

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ This is despite reduced incidence in other groups. See Clark et al., 2006.

⁶⁷ IPPF, 2006; also Clark et al., 2006.

⁶⁸ DFID, 2011b.

Malnutrition, hunger and childhood stunting

During the research, malnutrition, hunger and childhood stunting were widely cited by women and girls as being both causes and consequences of early marriage. In situations of drought, flooding or insecurity, marriage does not always translate into the hoped-for improvements in food security for girls and women.

‘In times of insecurity, the girl is more likely to take a risk and choose the better lifestyle of marriage.’ *Woman over 25, Somaliland*

Although married girls often fared better than unmarried daughters, child brides in Somaliland admitted they remained hungry despite the additional wealth of their husbands. Married girls in Bangladesh reported deliberately avoiding food during pregnancy to ensure low birth weight and ‘easier’ delivery, a strategy which has serious consequences for babies and for children whose growth is stunted. Withdrawal of food from child brides was also reported by women in Bangladesh as a form of gender-based violence linked to dowry payments. Husbands are known to refuse to give food to their brides, pushing them to the limits of starvation in some cases, and forcing families to increase dowry payments beyond previously agreed sums.

In fragile contexts, large amounts of money are invested in food and nutrition programmes, largely humanitarian, which target undernourished mothers and children.⁶⁹ Attention must be paid to the specific needs and vulnerabilities of child brides within these programmes.

Increased exposure to sexual and gender-based violence

Women who marry young are more likely to be beaten or threatened, and to believe that their husbands might be justified in beating or raping them.⁷⁰ During the course of our research in Niger, we came across several cases where girls were beaten for refusing sex with their husbands: refusal of sex is rarely, if ever, an option for girls or women. Although many parents and young women report that marriage is used as a strategy to protect girls from the threat of rape and sexual violence in fragile contexts, the stresses created by insecurity, by marriage itself, by immaturity and lack of negotiating power, mean that girls end up more exposed to abuse, including marital rape. A range of informants in Bangladesh confirmed this, reporting that men’s frustration at girls’ inability to cope with household and sexual demands and expectations regularly led to domestic violence.⁷¹ Similarly, boys who were unprepared for the responsibilities of marriage and family life were reported to become increasingly aggressive towards their wives. Dowry violence is a recognised consequence of early marriage in South Asia. When parents fail to produce the promised dowry for their newly married daughters, the girls are often beaten, tortured and, on occasion, killed.⁷²

Systemic gender inequalities and the treatment of girls as commodities to be bought and sold mean that girls may be trafficked after (often ‘false’) marriage.⁷³ A number of informants in Bangladesh confirmed this. The US Trafficking in Persons Report 2012 notes increasing cases in Bangladesh, both of girls and women trafficked for servile marriages in states with low female-to-male child ratios, and of increasing numbers of girls subjected to transactional sexual exploitation under the guise of temporary marriages.⁷⁴ Informants in the World Vision research also pointed out a rise in incidents of hostile groups, operating in the northern districts of Bangladesh, putting pressure on the poor to marry their children to (usually) older men. These children are then trafficked into India’s sex trade (home-based or brothel).⁷⁵ Every year, large numbers

⁶⁹ For example, Community Management of Acute Malnutrition, Supplementary Feeding Programmes, etc.

⁷⁰ Jenson and Thornton, 2003.

⁷¹ In discussion during key informant interviews, DFID Bangladesh officials referred to high rates of domestic violence amongst newly married adolescent girls, as husbands vent their frustrations with young wives’ inability to cope with ‘family life’ (i.e. sex and household management). Once childbearing begins, domestic violence subsides until the children are grown. When women reach their late thirties and men decide it is time to take on a new wife, domestic violence increases again as husbands try to ‘get rid’ of their wives (through divorce, desertion, death).

⁷² See, for example, www.irinnews.org/Report/86100/BANGLADESH-Dowry-violence-continues-unabated

⁷³ UNICEF, 2009

⁷⁴ United States Department of States, 2012 Trafficking in Persons Report (India Section)

⁷⁵ Key informant interview with Deputy Secretary of Women’s and Children’s Affairs, Bangladesh

of women and children are trafficked in this way from Bangladesh.⁷⁶ Those we spoke to in focus group discussions reported that growing fears around trafficking were also influencing parents to marry their children early as a means of protection.

Illiteracy

Illiteracy can be both a cause of early marriage and a consequence. For some girls, marriage means the end of schooling, either because they drop out in preparation for marriage or are withdrawn to take up their responsibilities in the marital home.⁷⁷ It is often the case that the same gendered norms that encourage conformity to traditional practices, mean that education is thought unnecessary for girls once married. However, one community in Niger admitted they had seen the positive impacts of girls' education in their village, noting that mothers who had received an education tended to have healthier children.

'Girls have more domestic work to do than boys so they don't have time to concentrate on their studies. But we try to send girls to school as well as boys because we have seen there is a difference in girls who are educated. Even their homes are cleaner.' *Father, Niger*

Although policies are changing, in some countries when girls become pregnant shortly after marriage, school regulations often demand their withdrawal from education.⁷⁸ The impact that low levels of education and illiteracy among girls and women have on social and economic development is extremely negative, affecting the health and welfare of children, contributing to unsustainable population growth and poverty. As the Global Partnership for Education recently put it, 'an educated female population increases a country's productivity and fuels economic growth'.⁷⁹

'I can only return to school now if my husband gives permission. He is the head of the house and makes all the decisions. I want to have three or four children but it is my husband's decision.' *Girl under 16, Niger*

Loss of childhood

Children who marry lose out on their childhood, and not only because their health and education is affected. Early marriage also threatens the happiness, well-being and entire life experience of girls.

'I would push my daughter to finish school before getting married. I didn't and now I have nothing.' *Girl under 16, Niger*

Child spouses rarely have the opportunity to play with their friends. They are burdened with adult responsibilities and expectations on their time and abilities, and lack the emotional, physical and psychological maturity to cope with this. Their rights as children are severely curtailed, and their welfare is compromised by the situations they find themselves in and by the potential traumas they face because of the negative consequences of early marriage.

The quality of life for a married child is often extremely poor. In one village in Niger, a woman described the consequences of obstructed labour, recounting one girl's experience as having distressed her so significantly that the girl was never herself again. Early marriage creates vicious and intergenerational cycles of poverty. In Niger and Bangladesh, government officials and NGO workers we spoke to were quick to point out the ways in which national development was compromised by early marriage. It is not only girls who carry the social, economic and health costs of early marriage; society pays dearly too.

⁷⁶ World Vision Bangladesh 2012; also United States Department of State, 2012 Trafficking in Persons Report (Bangladesh section)

⁷⁷ See Plan/ Because I am a Girl 2011; also Amin, 2011.

⁷⁸ In Somaliland we did come across schools in urban areas which allowed pregnant girls to continue their studies.

⁷⁹ See www.globalpartnership.org/our-work/areas-of-focus/girls-education-2/



In northern Ethiopia, World Vision is supporting community advocacy initiatives which seek to change and challenge local attitudes towards harmful practices such as early marriage. ©2009 Heidi Isaza/World Vision

Ending early marriage

It is no coincidence that the first ever UN International Day of the Girl Child on 11 October 2012 focused on the theme of ending child marriage. On the day, the UN, Girls Not Brides and others called on governments, civil society organisations, the private sector, faith-based groups and the international community to commit to eradicating early marriage. Chair of the Elders, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, issued the challenge: end child marriage by 2030. Doing so would mean that any girl born this year (2012) would not be made to marry before the age of 18.

A global call to action

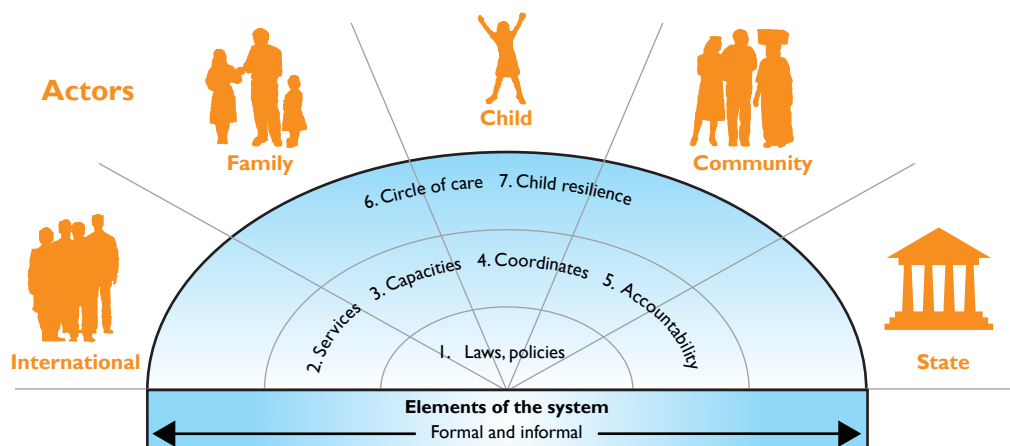
Eradicating early marriage requires community, national, regional and international commitments. UNICEF, UNFPA and UN Women have issued a joint statement⁸⁰ calling for urgent action to end the harmful practice of early marriage by:

- Enacting and enforcing legislation to increase the minimum age of marriage for girls to 18 and raise public awareness about child marriage as a violation of children's human rights.
- Mobilising girls, boys, parents and leaders to change discriminatory gender norms and create alternative social, economic and civil opportunities for girls.
- Addressing the root causes of child marriage, including gender discrimination and low value of girls, violence against girls and women, poverty, and religious or cultural justifications.
- Improving access to good quality primary and secondary education, ensuring that gender gaps in schooling are eliminated.
- Supporting girls who are already married by providing them with options for schooling, sexual and reproductive health services, including HIV prevention, livelihoods skills, opportunities and recourse from violence in the home.

Interventions ranging from proactive legislative enforcement to community-wide mobilisation are absolutely critical if early marriage is to be ended within our lifetime. In addition, holistic systems of protection must also be established and strengthened around children to ensure that efforts to prevent early marriage have the best chance of long-term success.

Figure 3 shows a child protection system: a set of co-ordinated formal and informal elements which are supported by a range of actors working together to prevent and respond to abuse, neglect, exploitation and other forms of violence against children, including early marriage.

FIGURE 3 The child protection system



⁸⁰The full statement can be found here. www.unwomen.org/2012/10/joint-statement-international-day-of-the-girl-child-2012/

Child protection systems consist of:

1. Laws, policies, standards and regulations which determine the system's structures, mandates and functions.
2. Services and service delivery mechanisms which provide protection for children.
3. Capacities to provide and perform child protection services, including capacity building, human and financial resources, and adequate facilities.
4. Co-operation, co-ordination and collaboration mechanisms which ensure that all elements of the systems, formal and informal, across different sectors and levels (global, national and local) work in a holistic and co-ordinated manner to ensure protection of children.
5. Accountability mechanisms that ensure the system responds effectively to key child protection concerns, and functions according to the UNCRC, relevant laws and in the best interests of the child.
6. Circle of care that includes attitudes, values, behaviours and traditional practices, and a caring, supportive and protective immediate social environment.
7. Children's resilience, life skills and participation, which encourage children to contribute to their own protection and that of others.

Each country has its own unique child protection system made up of these formal and informal elements, as appropriate to the context. Formal elements are established or sanctioned by the government and guided by laws, regulations and policies. Informal elements are shaped by attitudes, values, behaviours, social norms and traditional practices in society. As such, informal mechanisms are often the first point of contact in fragile states. The informal 'system' also includes the actions and behaviours of individuals – including children – who are vital actors in their own protection. As we have seen, these informal mechanisms do not always function in the best interests of the child, despite the good intentions that may lie behind them. Similarly, formal mechanisms, such as legislation to end child marriage, may not be fully enacted and enforced. Addressing gaps and weaknesses across child protection systems will be critical in the drive to end child marriage.

CHALLENGES IN SUPPORTING CHILD PROTECTION IN FRAGILE CONTEXTS

Recent World Vision UK research found that even where child welfare and protection systems do exist, government agencies in countries including Afghanistan, DRC, Nepal, Somalia and South Sudan are poorly co-ordinated across several ministries.⁸¹ In addition, frontline services such as health, education and justice that have regular contact with children (and a duty to protect them) frequently fail to co-ordinate with linked protection services. In Uganda it was clear that child welfare and probation services are not prioritised at district level and nationally allocated funding does not reach them. In addition, the Uganda Police lack transport so rely on the public to raise funds so they can travel to investigate criminal offences. In the DRC, co-ordination of child protection services across the multiple responsible ministries is weak, with duplication and overlap reported in some cases, including with the UN cluster system. In Sierra Leone, the principal responsible Ministry for Child Protection is hugely constrained due to underfunding, with only seven social workers allocated to 100 districts and a 60% deficit in provision of Family Support Units at district level. In South Sudan the district social workers only have funds to visit communities once a year.

Source: Ware (2012)

⁸¹ World Vision UK ADAPT assessments, 2011–2012.

Enacting and enforcing legislation

All countries in the world, apart from Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Palau and The Gambia,⁸² have legislation in place setting the minimum age of marriage for men and women (see Annex 1).⁸³ Around two-thirds of those countries set the legal age for marriage of girls at 18 years, a smaller number at 16 and 17, while Venezuela, Bolivia, Mozambique and Mexico have a minimum legal age of 14 years. In Lebanon, it is possible for a girl to marry legally at the age of 12.5 years.⁸⁴

As is widely acknowledged, early marriage continues despite legislation prohibiting the practice and it is therefore critically important that laws are enacted and proactively enforced on the ground. A wide range of individuals we spoke to in Bangladesh testified to this, citing ignorance of existing laws as a major barrier to the prevention of early marriage, and urging the need for Registrars (*kazis*) to be made more aware of their legal duties and responsibilities in this regard.

Mobilising girls, boys, parents and leaders to change discriminatory gender norms

Changes to discriminatory gender norms require the support, understanding and engagement of a wide range of stakeholders, including boys, parents and community leaders, as well as girls themselves. Indeed, it is only through the actions of enlightened, committed individuals and groups that changes to long-held assumptions and prejudices about the capacities and values of girls and women will be brought about. Mobilising men and boys to tackle gender norms, including violence against women and girls, enables them to voice their own fears and vulnerabilities and ensures that the principle of equity is at the heart of this renewed engagement. Ending early marriage through sustainable community dialogue and mobilisation holds the promise of lasting, positive change for all members of society.

‘It is very painful if your daughter dies in childbirth. It is a greater shame, even than that of a pregnancy before marriage, because she is one that you love.’ *Father, Niger*

ENGAGING MEN IN PREVENTING EARLY MARRIAGE IN INDIA

World Vision believes that engaging men and boys in the fight against early marriage is crucial to its successful prevention. In India, World Vision is implementing a project designed to engage men. It is challenging the beliefs and behaviours of fathers, sons, husbands and brothers who have the capacity to change harmful practices in their communities. By strengthening the role of both the family and state as critical to the broader child protection system, the project aims to improve the status of the girl child and to have a lasting impact on gender-based violence against women, particularly early marriage. Gender-based violence is structurally rooted in gender inequality – a system that positions men over women and instils a sense of entitlement and privilege in many men.

Addressing the root causes of early marriage

As we have seen, early marriage is rooted in a number of causes, ranging from cultural traditions and gender discrimination to poverty and religious belief. However, many of the triggers for early marriage tend to be dependent on context, and in fragile environments we found these triggers are often linked to assumptions about the protective potential of marriage. In humanitarian crises, for example, parents may marry off their girls to secure their access to food and safeguard their siblings, to protect girls from rape or to ensure that family honour is maintained, according to customary practice. It is critical that in these circumstances attractive alternatives to early marriage are made available to girls and their families, and mainstreamed into humanitarian and emergency responses which recognise the importance of tackling gender-based violence. In line with efforts to mobilise communities to address early marriage, tackling its root causes also requires behavioural change to undermine damaging and discriminatory practices and prevent them recurring in future.

⁸² The Gambian constitution states only that men and women of ‘full age and capacity’ shall have the right to marry and found a family. See <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/indwm/June%202012/table%203a%20Legal%20age%20for%20marriage.xls>.

⁸³ In some countries, such as Somalia and Niger, these laws are in draft form.

⁸⁴ There are also some exceptions where girls can be married under the minimum legal age with parental consent. See Annex 1.

ADDRESSING THE ROOT CAUSES OF NEGATIVE CUSTOMARY PRACTICES: FGM ABANDONMENT

World Vision's FGM Abandonment (FGMA) strategy is based on a behaviour change communication approach that recognises that individual behaviour change is inextricably linked to the community's and society's approval and reinforcement of it. This means that an individual can only sustain positive behaviour (i.e. FGM abandonment) if it is supported by the surrounding context. World Vision's FGMA strategy recognises that interventions are needed at all three levels: the individual, the community, and the environment. Intervening for positive change within these concentric contextual circles provides '360 degrees' of support to household members, enabling them to abandon FGM permanently. The empowerment of individuals, community groups and institutions progresses as these target groups gain awareness, knowledge, skills and capability.

Anti-FGM/C campaigns led by World Vision in Kenya are having a positive impact on the community. Seminars and door-to-door campaigns on the dangers of the practice are held, targeting parents, governments officials, children, men, women, teachers and the community as a whole. It is here that young girls have an opportunity to interact with role models, who show that one can be successful and live a normal life without undergoing FGM/C. Local schools are registering an increase in enrolment and retention of girls in primary schools since the start of the campaign.

Improving access to quality education

Enrolment in free, compulsory basic education of good quality has been widely recognised as both a cause and a consequence of reduced early marriage rates.⁸⁵ Improvements in access to education must also include 'second chance' opportunities for those girls who may have already married and borne children and who wish to return to education to improve the health, well-being and life chances of themselves and their families. These may include non-formal educational initiatives or accelerated learning programmes (particularly common in post-emergency contexts) designed to equip children with the necessary skills to re-enter mainstream schooling or access the world of work with enhanced skills and capacities, such as literacy and numeracy. In order to successfully improve girls' access to good quality basic education, girls at high risk of dropping out due to early marriage, and their families and communities, must be directly targeted. In some countries, including Bangladesh and Malawi, stipends or cash transfer programmes have been successfully used to ensure that girls are enrolled and achieve in school, enabling them to reach their full potential and close down gender gaps in education.⁸⁶

SCHOOL ENROLMENT IN MALAWI REDUCES PROBABILITY OF EARLY MARRIAGE AND PREGNANCY

'Programs to increase school enrollment... such as cash transfers to girls, may be particularly effective in giving out-of-school girls incentives to resume their studies in addition to reducing dropout rates. In Malawi, the effects of a small cash transfer on re-enrolment were large, with the reenrolment rate for girls who had dropped out before the program increasing two and a half times. In addition, a year after the program's introduction, the probability of marriage for girls receiving transfers declined by more than 40% and the probability of pregnancy fell by 30%. These results imply that small incentives can bring substantial improvements for girls most at risk.'

Source: World Bank, 2012, pp.315–6⁸⁷

⁸⁵ See, for example, Plan/Because I am a Girl, 2011.

⁸⁶ For Bangladesh, see: <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTABOUTUS/IDA/0,,contentMDK:21227882~menuPK:3266877~pagePK:51236175~piPK:437394~theSitePK:73154,00.html> For Malawi see Box 13.

⁸⁷ World Bank, 2012, pp.315–6, emphasis added. The report goes on to note that 'evidence also indicates that the design of these transfer programs needs to take into account intra-household resource allocation to ensure they do not indirectly worsen schooling outcomes for adolescent girls. A conditional cash transfer program in Colombia that increased the likelihood of attendance and enrolment in secondary school for both boys and girls also decreased attendance and increased work hours for non-participating siblings – particularly sisters – of participants' (ibid., p. 316).

Supporting girls who are already married

Both prevention of early marriage and protection of child brides is essential for a comprehensive approach to tackling early marriage. Married children and child parents are among the most vulnerable children, particularly in fragile contexts, and should therefore be a priority group for protection from exploitation, violence and abuse. World Vision is increasing its response to the specific needs of child brides, recognising the extent to which they are doubly vulnerable as a result of both their age and status. For example, in Zambia the government introduced a new policy that permitted girl pupils who became pregnant to return to school once the baby was old enough to be looked after by the girl's mother or another relative. World Vision conducted an awareness-raising campaign with girls and schools to make them aware of this policy change and tackle any stigma attached to child mothers attending school.

ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE IN ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia has one of the highest rates of early marriage in the world with 24% of women aged 15-49 married before the age of 15.¹³ DFID Ethiopia's End Child Marriage Programme, building on previous experiences including the Berhane Hewan Project, is a joint project with the Ethiopian Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs and the Amhara Bureau of Women, Children and Youth Affairs. The programme, Finote Hiwot, began in 2012 and aims to delay marriage for at least 200,000 girls in Amhara Region.

Recognising the complexity of the problem and based on the understanding that parents generally do what they think is best for their children, the programme model includes:

- Building a critical mass of influential community members, who join together to discuss social norms, attitudes and practices and challenge myths related to early marriage, leading to a collective public commitment to abandonment of the practice
- Empowering girls to challenge gender inequality through Girls' Clubs, which provide safe spaces, access to advice and information, and the opportunity to develop social networks – particularly for girls who are not in school. These Clubs build girls' knowledge, confidence, voice, agency and aspirations to engage in wider community discourse and increase their ability to exercise more control over their lives.
- Engaging boys who often have little voice, influence or agency over decisions affecting their lives, through Boys' Clubs, which provide safe spaces and opportunities to develop social networks, seek advice and information, in order that they too can participate in wider community discourse and influence social norms around early marriage.
- Providing economic incentives to enable families to make different economic choices about their daughters' lives .
- Engaging with national, regional and local media to raise broad awareness of early marriage in order to mobilise communities, reinforce messages and support longer term processes of behaviour change, particularly in remote places.
- Strengthening government capacity at all levels to design, implement and finance large scale programmes to end early marriage.

Evaluations of the Berhane Hewan Programme concluded that early marriage was eliminated in some sites, the quality of girls lives was improved, community dialogue groups felt empowered and the government built its capacity to implement activities to end child marriage. Finote Hiwot is building on these lessons learned and aims to eradicate early marriage in the Amhara region by 2030.

Source: DFID



Less than one in two Afghan girls enrolls in primary school and each year 1,800 Afghan women die of pregnancy and birth related causes per 100,000 live births. World Vision's child protection mapping process in Afghanistan identified early and forced marriage as a priority child protection issue. © 2012 Paul Bettings/World Vision

Setting an agenda for action

Early marriage is a global problem which cuts across countries, cultures, religions and ethnicities. It is rooted in harmful traditions and gender inequality, as well as desperation caused by poverty and insecurity. It denies children, particularly girls, their rights: the right to marry only with 'free and full consent', the right to protection from violence and abuse, the right to health, the right to maximum support for survival and development. It cuts short girls' education and traps them, their families and their communities in a cycle of poverty. Women who have married early face an ongoing denial of their human rights for their entire lifetime.

We believe that the UK Government can take a number of steps to reform existing development and humanitarian policy to ensure that the practice of early marriage is ended by 2030 and that those girls who are made to marry early have access to health, education and protection services to ameliorate the worse effects of their circumstances. We also believe that the UK Government has a crucial role to play in leveraging its considerable global influence to join with others to lobby for political support for the movement against early marriage, ensuring it is brought to an end by 2030.

What the UK Government can do

- **Demonstrate global leadership in committing to ending early marriage by 2030**

The UK Government has recognised that early marriage is a human rights violation and a form of violence against women and girls. The Government can strengthen the UK's global leadership on women's and girls' rights by proactively working to end early marriage, through strong political commitments and increased funding.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton announced on 10 October 2012 that the United States will join a global campaign to stop early marriage by the year 2030. The UK Prime Minister should publicly commit to this campaign.

- **Prioritise early marriage in the Government's Human Rights Agenda**

Recognising the importance of eliminating early marriage, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office should focus attention on the issue in its Annual Human Rights Report. The report documents the work of the UK Government to promote human rights overseas and also reviews human rights developments in countries of concern. In 2011, the report included sections on children's rights and women's rights. In the future, these sections could highlight activities to tackle early marriage and support those who have been married young. If early marriage is made a thematic human rights priority, the situation in each country of concern would be included in the report each year.

- **Mainstream early marriage prevention into emergency and humanitarian responses**

Early and forced marriage is used as a coping mechanism and means of survival for families in crisis situations. The UK is one of the largest donors of official humanitarian aid. DFID recognises the impact of recurrent humanitarian crises on its development work and has prioritised building the resilience of the very poorest through tackling food insecurity and improving livelihoods. Joining up humanitarian responses to development initiatives that seek to tackle violence against women and girls in contexts of crises will help to ensure that in contexts of greater stress, families have alternative means of protecting their children instead of resorting to early marriage. For example, DFID can ensure that creating safe spaces for girls and women at risk of gender-based violence is a key priority in humanitarian response and development.

- **Address harmful practices holistically**

Evidence from our research indicates that sustained campaigns which have successfully reduced FGM/C have inadvertently contributed to a fear of 'illegal' (i.e. premarital) pregnancy, which causes girls to marry early.

The approach of the UK in its commitments and programmes to tackle FGM/C must therefore ensure that such work does not result in a higher prevalence of early marriage, where the two practices are perceived in communities as measures to protect a girl's virginity. Recognising the need to tackle causes of early marriage alongside FGM/C, together with an approach that encourages an environment that promotes women's and girls' rights, will ensure that initiatives that tackle FGM/C do no unintended harm.

- **Mainstream early marriage issues into education, maternal health and other programmes to improve existing outcomes and tackle the harmful impacts of early marriage**

The UK Government is committed to supporting actions to help achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in countries around the world. DFID's Strategic Vision for Women and Girls⁸⁸ includes commitments to lead international action to:

- **Delay first pregnancy and support safe childbirth;**
- **Get economic assets directly to girls and women;**
- **Get girls through secondary school;**
- **Prevent violence against girls and women.**

DFID's programmes support these goals and have achieved substantial outcomes. However, outcomes such as delaying first pregnancy and increasing girls' enrolment in school could be improved in the long term by integrating efforts to prevent early marriage (including by continuing to promote birth registration). The global campaign, launched in conjunction with the first International Day of the Girl Child in October 2012, aims to end child marriage within 18 years because it will take time to accomplish, particularly in fragile contexts where sustainable programming is even more difficult. The Government must recognise and support the need for a long-term approach and programming, and must take pressure off the need to show immediate results, where the challenges of fragile contexts and the process of attitudinal change requires complex and flexible responses.

Early marriage has been an obstacle to meeting many of the MDGs.⁸⁹ The post-2015 framework will set new goals on child and maternal mortality, access to health services, education, protection and the ending of poverty. Ending child marriage will make a real contribution to achieving new global goals on development.

⁸⁸ DFID, 2011a.

⁸⁹ EveryChild, 2010.

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World Vision believes that engaging men and boys in the fight against early marriage is crucial to its successful prevention. In India, World Vision is implementing a project designed to engage men, challenging the beliefs and behaviours of fathers, sons, husbands and brothers who have the capacity to change harmful practices, such as early marriage, in their communities. ©2012 Annila Harris/World Vision

Annex I

	Percentage of women aged 20–24 married by age 18			GID* score for % of women married between 15–19 years of age	Legal Age of Marriage		Ratification of International Conventions			
	Total	Urban	Rural		Male	Female	UN CRC	Consent to Marriage	CEDAW	African Charter
Sub-Saharan Africa	38	26	50							
Angola	-	-	-	0.36	18	18	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Benin	34	19	47	0.29	18	15	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Botswana	-	-	-	0.05	21	21	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Burkina Faso	48	29	61	0.35	20	17	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Burundi	18	14	18	0.07	21	18	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Cameroon	36	23	57	0.36	18	15	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Cape Verde	18	-	-	-	18	18	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Central African Republic	61	57	64	0.42	22	18	Yes	No	Yes	Signed only
Chad	72	65	73	0.49	-	-	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Comoros	-	-	-	-	-	-	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Congo	31	24	40	0.56	21	18	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Cote d'Ivoire	35	27	43	0.25	21	18	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Democratic Republic of Congo	39	31	45	0.74	18	15	Yes	No	Yes	Signed only
Djibouti	5	5	13	-	-	-	Yes	No	Yes	Signed only
Equatorial Guinea	-	-	-	0.26	18	18	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Eritrea	47	31	60	0.38	18	18	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Ethiopia	49	27	55	0.3	18	18	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Gabon	34	30	49	0.22	18	15	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Gambia	36	24	45	0.39	-	-	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Ghana	25	13	38	0.16	18	18	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Guinea	63	45	75	0.46	18	17	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Guinea-Bissau	24	14	32	-	-	-	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Kenya	26	-	-	0.17	18	18	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Lesotho	23	13	26	0.18	-	-	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Liberia	38	25	49	0.36	-	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Madagascar	39	29	42	0.34	18	18	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Malawi	50	38	53	0.37	18	18	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Mali	71	60	77	0.5	18	15	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mauritania	35	27	44	0.28	18	18	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Mauritius	-	-	-	0.11	18	18	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Mozambique	52	-	-	0.47	16	14	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Namibia	9	6	11	0.08	21	21	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Niger	75	42	84	0.62	18	15	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Nigeria	39	22	50	0.28	-	-	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Rwanda	13	9	14	0.07	21	21	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sao Tome and Principe	33	31	37	-	-	-	Yes	No	Yes	Signed only
Senegal	39	23	55	0.29	-	-	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Seychelles	-	-	-	-	-	-	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Sierra Leone	48	30	61	0.47	21	21	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Somalia	45	35	52	-	-	-	No	No	No	Signed only
South Africa	6	-	-	0.03	18	18	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sudan	34	24	40	0.21	-	-	Yes	No	No	Yes
Swaziland	5	1	6	0.09	-	-	Yes	No	Yes	Signed only
Togo	24	15	36	0.2	20	17	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Uganda	46	27	52	0.32	18	16	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
United Republic of Tanzania	38	-	-	0.25	18	18	-	No	Yes	Yes
Zambia	42	26	53	0.24	21	21	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Zimbabwe	30	-	-	0.23	-	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

	Percentage of women aged 20–24 married by age 18			GID* score for % of women married between 15–19 years of age	Legal Age of Marriage		Ratification of International Conventions			
	Total	Urban	Rural		Male	Female	UN CRC	Consent to Marriage	CEDAW	African Charter
Middle East and North Africa	18	12	24							
Algeria	2	2	2	0.04	21	18	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Bahrain	-	-	-	0.07	18	15	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Djibouti	5	5	13	-	18	18	Yes	No	Yes	Signed only
Egypt	17	9	22	0.15	18	16	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	-	-	-	0.18	-	-	Yes	No	No	N/A
Iraq	17	16	19	0.21	18	18	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Jordan	10	10	7	0.08	18	18	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
Kuwait	-	-	-	0.05	17	15	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Lebanon	11	-	-	-	-	-	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	-	-	-	0.01	-	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Morocco	16	12	21	0.128	18	18	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Occupied Palestinian Territory	19	-	-	0.24	-	-	No	No	No	N/A
Oman	-	-	-	0.16	18	18	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Qatar	-	-	-	-	-	-	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Saudi Arabia	-	-	-	0.16	20	17	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Sudan	34	24	40	0.21	-	-	Yes	No	No	N/A
Syrian Arab Republic	13	15	12	0.25	-	-	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Tunisia	-	-	-	0.03	20	20	Yes	Yes	Yes	Signed only
United Arab Emirates	-	-	-	0.19	-	-	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Yemen	32	28	35	0.27	15	15	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
South Asia	46	30	55							
Afghanistan	39	-	-	0.57	18	16	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Bangladesh	66	53	70	0.48	21	18	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
Bhutan	-	-	-	0.27	18	18	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
India	47	29	56	0.3	21	18	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Maldives	-	-	-	-	18	18	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Nepal	51	41	54	0.4	20	20	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Pakistan	24	16	29	0.21	18	16	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Sri Lanka	12	-	-	0.07	18	18	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Latin America and the Caribbean	29	-	-							
Antigua and Barbuda	-	-	-	-	18	18	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
Argentina	-	-	-	0.12	18	16	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
Bahamas	-	-	-	-	18	18	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Barbados	-	-	-	-	16	16	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
Belize	-	-	-	-	18	18	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Bolivia	26	22	37	0.12	16	14	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Brazil	36	-	-	0.17	21	21	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
Chile	-	-	-	0.12	18	18	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Colombia	23	19	38	0.18	18	18	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Costa Rica	-	-	-	0.2	15	15	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Cuba	-	-	-	0.29	18	18	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
Dominica	-	-	-	-	16	16	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Dominican Republic	40	36	50	0.29	18	18	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
Ecuador	22	-	-	0.22	18	18	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
El Salvador	25	-	-	0.16	18	18	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Grenada	-	-	-	-	-	-	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Guatemala	35	-	-	0.26	18	18	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
Guyana	20	15	22	-	-	-	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Haiti	30	27	33	0.19	-	-	Yes	No	Yes	N/A

	Percentage of women aged 20–24 married by age 18			GID* score for % of women married between 15–19 years of age	Legal Age of Marriage		Ratification of International Conventions			
	Total	Urban	Rural		Male	Female	UN CRC	Consent to Marriage	CEDAW	African Charter
Honduras	39	33	46	0.31	-	-	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Jamaica	9	7	11	0.01	18	18	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Mexico	23	-	-	-	16-18	14-16	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
Nicaragua	41	-	-	0.32	21	18	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Panama	-	-	-	0.22	18	18	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Paraguay	18	-	-	0.17	16	16	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Peru	19	-	-	0.13	16	16	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Saint Kitts and Nevis	-	-	-	-	-	-	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Saint Lucia	-	-	-	-	18	18	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	-	-	-	-	-	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
Suriname	19	14	33	-	20	20	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Trinidad and Tobago	8	-	-	0.09	18	18	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
Uruguay	-	-	-	0.13	18	18	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Venezuela	-	-	-	0.18	16	14	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
Industrialised Countries/ Territories	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Andorra	-	-	-	-	16	16	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Austria	-	-	-	-	16	16	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
Belgium	-	-	-	-	18	18	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Cyprus	-	-	-	-	18	18	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
Czech Republic	-	-	-	-	18	18	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
Denmark	-	-	-	-	18	18	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
Estonia	-	-	-	-	18	18	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Finland	-	-	-	-	21	21	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
France	-	-	-	-	21	21	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Germany	-	-	-	-	18	18	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
Greece	-	-	-	-	18	18	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Hungary	-	-	-	-	18	18	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
Iceland	-	-	-	-	18	18	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
Ireland	-	-	-	-	18	18	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Italy	-	-	-	-	18	18	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Latvia	-	-	-	-	18	18	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Liechtenstein	-	-	-	-	18	18	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Lithuania	-	-	-	-	18	18	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Luxembourg	-	-	-	-	18	16	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Malta	-	-	-	-	18	18	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Monaco	-	-	-	-	-	-	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Netherlands	-	-	-	-	18	18	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
Norway	-	-	-	-	18	18	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
Poland	-	-	-	-	21	18	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
Portugal	-	-	-	-	16	16	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Slovakia	-	-	-	-	18	18	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
Slovenia	-	-	-	-	18	18	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Spain	-	-	-	-	18	18	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
Sweden	-	-	-	-	18	18	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
Switzerland	-	-	-	-	18	18	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
United Kingdom	-	-	-	-	18	18	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A

*The GID (Gender, Institutions and Development database) is a new statistical index developed by the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development), which measures inequalities that exist in social institutions. This offers a new approach recognising that social institutions (such as government policies and traditional customs) internalise gender discrimination and therefore transpose inequality on a national scale. Gender discrimination in social institutions are manifested in entrenched beliefs such as male preference, a belief that women should not inherit, and a belief that a woman's voice and their movement in the public sphere should be curtailed. The GID therefore provides insight into the discrimination that causes social inequalities and prevents girls from realising their rights. The GID is reflected not as a rank, but a scale from 0 (lowest) to 1 (highest) rating the proliferation of the practice of early marriage in each country (share of girls between 15 and 19 who are currently married, divorced or widowed).

World Vision UK
World Vision House, Opal Drive,
Fox Milne, Milton Keynes, MK15 0ZR

World Vision UK – London office
11 Belgrave Road,
London, SW1V 1RB

www.worldvision.org.uk

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