

Ending Child Marriage in a Generation

What Research is Needed?



BY MARGARET E. GREENE, PHD



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*Cover: A pregnant 15-year-old with her older husband, who is a
migrant worker in Mumbai, India, meet with The Veerni Project.
They were wed when she was ten in his village near Jodhpur.
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The Problem of Child Marriage for Girls and for Development

Two interrelated reasons form the central rationales for working to end the practice of child marriage: upholding the rights of girls, and achieving health and development goals. Girls' rights, health and development are undermined by the impact of early marriage, pregnancy and childbearing on their mortality and morbidity, the early termination of their schooling, and the ripples of girls' poor health and limited human capital on their future productivity and the lives of their children, families and their nations. In the absence of valid consent – which 'children' by definition are not able to give – child marriage may be understood as a coerced act that violates the human rights of 14.2 million girls who marry as children each year.³

Once girls are married, their status infringes upon a range of their rights. Most child brides are burdened with responsibilities as wives and mothers with little support, resources, or life experience to meet these challenges. Compared to their unmarried peers or to older women, girls who marry before the age of 18 are likely to have lower educational attainment, greater chances of experiencing unwanted pregnancies, and are at greater risk of sexual and reproductive health morbidities and maternal mortality.⁴ They go into marriage at a disadvantage with regard to their husbands, who tend to be older and to have more experience of school, work and often, previous relationships. Other harmful consequences may include exposure to HIV infection, violence in the home, and limited freedom to interact with their peers or to participate in civic and cultural activities in their communities.⁵

Child marriage is also a uniquely challenging impediment to development. The cumulative effects of reduced school attainment, maternal morbidities and mortality, and the long-term impact of early marriage and childbearing on children are well documented.⁶ The impact on population momentum of over 14 million girls marrying each year and directly having children, often closely spaced, is also important. The pressures to have one child after another are especially great in settings where son preference is common and girls must produce not only children but sons. As two thought leaders on the connections between individual girls' lives and development goals have put it, investing "in girls through adolescence provide a demographic 'three-for': reducing population momentum by delaying marriage and childbearing, thereby increasing the space between generations; lowering desired family size as more educationally accomplished girls are less reliant on multiple children for security; and decreasing the age and power differential between partners, thus positively affecting women's ability to meet their fertility goals. Benefits also extend to the next generation, because those who marry later and with more authority are likely to invest in their children (especially their girl children) in ways that establish a virtuous cycle of improved health and education."⁷

Though the data are inconsistent and of low quality in some settings, we know that child marriage is a "universal" issue in the sense that it occurs in every region, among people of every religion. It is part of the broader global pattern of adolescent girls' early and unequalitarian sexual relationships, often with boys or men who are significantly older than they are. At the same time, our understanding of intra- and inter-country differences in child marriage is limited and more segmented analyses of the diverse expressions of child marriage are needed, analyses that cover not only geographic variety, but religion, ethnicity, education, social class and so on. Weak data in many settings conceal distinctive patterns among sub-populations, though there is an emerging consensus that these sub-national populations are the level at which to work most effectively on child marriage.

Purpose of This Paper

In recent years, the obstacles that child marriage poses to development and to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals have been widely recognized. Varied responses to the problem have been devised. The number of programs testing different approaches to ending child marriage has grown, and many have been evaluated. We are starting to get a sense of what works and the general areas in which investing in research could make a difference.

The purpose of this paper is to identify gaps in the research on child marriage in which additional investment could catalyze change. Much remains to understand about child marriage and how to influence it. By mapping out current knowledge of child marriage and the programs designed to address it, and by highlighting questions to which we do not yet know the answers, the paper is intended to generate discussion in the field and clarify what we need to know to bring an end to this deeply harmful practice.

The paper also moves us closer to the development of a shared theory of change for this field: given that many organizations are now working in this area, how can their programs and related research be understood – aligned – in such a way that their work feeds into a single theory of change?

The research gaps on their own should not drive investments in child marriage. A worthy research mandate must also be driven by programmatic and advocacy needs. The recommended areas for research are not meant to provide a definitive menu, but rather to describe the general contours of what we know and what we need to understand better.

What Are Our Objectives and How Do We Talk About Them?

The terms of discussion affect our understanding of child marriage. Over the past five years or so, for example, the discussion has favored “child marriage” over “early and forced marriage,” to underscore the fact that girls often agree to early marriage – because they lack education, resources or other options for their lives. But some advocates still prefer the latter for its descriptive precision. See Box 1 for some of the many legal and social concepts of relevance to child marriage.

Many of the organizations working on programs to delay marriage are using the term “child marriage,” but one school of thought is that the term conflates the problem of age and the problem of consent. In general, the child marriage field has emphasized the importance of the inappropriately early age at which girls and some boys are marrying, but without highlighting the issue of consent. This is likely because minors, by definition, are unable to give formal consent. A recent, comprehensive analysis of terminology by the Sexual Rights Initiative provides quite a definitive take on the issue: They highlight the fact that there is no universally accepted definition of the word ‘child,’ and thus no universally accepted definition of ‘child marriage,’ leading to divergent interpretations of the concept.

“The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) defines a child as a “human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.” Since different nations allow their citizens to attain majority at different ages, and some allow majority to be attained upon marriage, this deference to national law is a real and concerning loophole... In order to intelligently strategize for the future, it is vital that all parties share a common currency with regard to the language. Until then, however, the term ‘early and forced marriage’ is the safest route forward, no matter which way it is read.”⁸

The argument offered here is compelling, and certainly mandates the use of the term ‘early and forced marriage’ in any engagement with the United Nations system, for example. Nonetheless, ‘child marriage’ has gained currency among practitioners and applied researchers and is the shorthand the field is currently using; for this reason, it is the term used in this paper.

What We Know So Far

Over the past five to ten years, many organizations, researchers and donors have developed, implemented and, to a lesser extent, evaluated programs to delay or prevent child marriage and mitigate its harmful effects on the lives of girls and their families. Concentrated in specific sectors (health, education) and tending to emphasize specific approaches to working with girls (life skills, awareness raising),

Terminology and Concepts of Relevance to Child Marriage

Abduction for marriage – a tradition persistent in Ethiopia and Kazakhstan, among other places, where girls are pressed to marry men who have carried them off from their villages, whether or not the event was voluntary.

Arranged marriage – one in which both parties consent to the assistance of their parents or a third party, such as a matchmaker, in identifying a spouse, although the consent may be uninformed.

Child marriage or early marriage – occurs when at least one of the spouses is below the age of 18, a child, as defined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.¹ Some experts argue that all child marriage should be viewed as forced marriage, even when the child appears to give his or her consent.

Child prostitution – the commercial exploitation by an adult of someone under 18 years old, involving a payment in money or in kind to the child or to one or more third parties.

Child slavery – The 1956 Supplementary Slavery Convention identifies the following practices relating to women in marriage as akin to slavery, and all have been documented in child marriage: “The promise or giving of a woman, without her having the right to refuse, by her parents, family or others in marriage in return for consideration in money or in

kind; the handing over of a woman to another person by her husband or his kin for ‘value received or otherwise;’ or widow inheritance, whereby a married woman is transferred to become the wife of another man upon the death of her husband.”²

Forced marriage – one in which one or both of the parties is married without his or her consent or against his or her will.

Shotgun wedding – an American colloquialism, used in many parts of the world, which refers to a form of forced marriage occasioned by an unplanned pregnancy. Some religions and cultures consider it a moral imperative to marry in such a situation, based on reasoning that premarital sex or out-of-wedlock births are sinful, punished by law, or otherwise stigmatized. It can also be seen as a way to hold to account the man responsible for the pregnancy.

Statutory rape – the crime of having sex with someone who is younger than an age that is specified by law.³

Sugar daddies – older men who engage young girls in sex in exchange for ‘gifts’ of money, food, housing, clothing or other help for the girls and their families. This intergenerational transactional sex can be a key survival strategy for many poor women and may involve multiple male partners.

Trafficking – the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons for the purpose of exploitation. It involves the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability, or the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve consent from a person in control over another person. Vulnerability is understood to refer to any situation in which the person has no real and acceptable alternative but to submit to the abuse. The consent of a victim of trafficking is irrelevant where any of these means have been used.³

Trafficking of children – Taking children out of their protective environments and preying on their vulnerability for the purpose of exploitation, sexual or otherwise. It may include third-party brokering of young girls for purchase by older wealthy men. International Labour Organization Convention No. 182 (1999) on the Worst Forms of Child Labour classifies trafficking among the “forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery” and thereby as a practice to be eliminated as a matter of urgency, regardless of the country’s level of development.

these programs have taught us a lot about where we should be focusing our efforts to prevent, delay, and mitigate child marriage.

A number of recent reports on child marriage deserve mention, as they offer new data, summarize the range of programs, or frame the issue in new ways.

Data, Measurement and Social Science Research

A 2012 UNFPA report presents some of the most recent data on child marriage, including the correlates of the practices and its consequences.⁹ The UNFPA report on the general situation of child marriage highlights and provides detailed country profiles on the ten countries where child marriage is most prevalent: Niger, Chad, Bangladesh, Guinea, Mali, Mozambique, Malawi, Madagascar, Sierra Leone, and Burkina Faso. Though it does not cover programs to address child marriage, the report does offer a number of general recommendations, including: first, the need to use data to identify and target geographic “hotspots” with high proportions and numbers of girls at risk of child marriage; second, the need to focus on addressing the root causes underlying marriage in a given setting; and third, the need to mitigate the harmful impact of child marriage on married girls.

The UNFPA figures are based on analyses of Demographic and Health Survey data, a well-respected source on this and other topics. The estimates differ from earlier ones in part because they are projections and because they use new data from additional countries. Many people turn to UNICEF’s State of

the World's Children and related resources for the latest data on child marriage.¹⁰ UNICEF's data provided the backdrop for the Council on Foreign Relations report mentioned below.

Another relevant review out of the Population Council summarizes research from several countries in an analysis of the transactional costs of marriage in the developing world.¹¹ The review finds that the costs of marriage have increased dramatically in a wide range of settings, and when expectations are not met by the bride's family, there can be strong negative consequences for women's wellbeing within marriage. The review also cited data from Nepal that shows that childhood poverty is closely associated with marriage during adolescence. While both brideprice and dowry commoditize the value of girls, girls appear to fare better with brideprice than with dowry. With brideprice, the girl's family is paid by the groom or his family and the payment they receive increases based on the "worth" of their daughter, so there is an incentive for them to delay marriage slightly so their daughter has time to become a more appealing, high-value candidate. In South Africa, for example, the expectation of future brideprice encourages parents to invest in their daughters' education. With dowry, the family of the girl must pay the groom and/or his family, therefore, the incentive for them lies in marrying their daughter early before she has a chance to acquire "value." In South Asia, dowry is positively associated with age at marriage: the later a girl marries, the higher the price her family has to pay.

Economists at the World Bank have been exploring the measurement of child marriage and have found conventional approaches sorely lacking.¹² As they state it, "...most existing studies simply report the incidence of child marriage, that is the share of girls who marry early (before the age of 18) within a population. Other measures that would take into account how young girls marry are often not provided, and no tests are carried to assess the robustness of comparisons or statistics about child marriage between countries, between groups within countries, or between time periods with respect to the age threshold used to identify child marriage. Yet, the consequences of child marriage are not the same whether one marries at the age of 12 or 18."¹³ In general, however, the costs of child marriage for a girl's health, education, and wellbeing are greater the earlier she marries. This suggests a serious re-thinking of most measurement of child marriage and a return to the kinds of data conventionally used in this field. They suggest more attention to the "depth" and "severity" of child marriage, concepts drawn from the literature on poverty. Following this line of thinking, the authors develop an alternative set of global estimates of child marriage: its incidence, the child marriage gap, and the child marriage gap squared.¹⁴

Programmatic Reviews

In a review conducted in 2011, researchers at the International Center for Research on Women classified evaluated program strategies for preventing child marriage into five categories:¹⁵

- Empower girls at risk for early marriage with information, skills, safe spaces¹⁶ and support networks. These programs have sought to reduce girls' social isolation and to prepare girls to act on the choices they must make in life. An example is the Maharashtra Life Skills Program in India, which met with girls for one hour each weekday over one year, teaching them about social institutions, life skills, and health, including child health and nutrition.¹⁷
- Enhance girls' access to school and improve the quality of that education. Quality schooling provides a viable alternative to marriage for some girls by providing girls with social networks and raising their expectations of their own lives. Weak schools can contribute to parents' view that marriage is the best place for their daughters. The expectation that girls will marry early undermines the commitment to schooling. The two-year Ishraq program in Egypt prepares out-of-school girls for re-entry into the formal school system, teaching literacy and numeracy, life skills and sports.¹⁸
- Offer economic support and incentives for girls and families. Economic training, support and sometimes incentives that address families' economic reasons for marrying their daughters early provide alternatives to marriage and increase the value of girls to their families of origin. One example is Berhane Hewan in Ethiopia, which provided families with a goat as long as their daughters remained in the program and remained unmarried until age 18.¹⁹ Another example is the Zomba cash transfer program in Malawi, which found unconditional cash transfers to be more effective in delaying marriage than conditional transfers.²⁰

- Educate and mobilize parents and community members. By educating and mobilizing parents and communities – those who decide when and whom girls will marry – to change social norms relating to expectations of girls and their marriage prospects, these programs hope to delay the age of marriage. Tostan in Senegal has implemented long-term, informal community education and awareness-raising that has led to community mobilization, sometimes around public declarations against harmful practices including female genital cutting and early marriage.²¹
- Foster an enabling legal and policy framework. Most countries, even those with high levels of child marriage, have established legal minimum ages at marriage. Policy advocacy to clarify, strengthen and enforce such laws is needed. In Afghanistan, the Community-based Rural Livelihoods Program has convened groups of women to mobilize for action on local issues of gender inequality and strengthened local shura councils to respond to problems including child marriage.²²

As a follow-on to that review, ICRW decided to look more closely at several programs through a set of case studies. Their *Pathways to Girls' Reproductive Health, Rights and Empowerment* project has been exploring how and why programs that seem to have demonstrated success in delaying marriage and childbearing have worked; whether “empowerment” has been part of the process of achieving success and/or an outcome of the intervention; and what the implications of this knowledge are for replication and scale-up.²³

Also building on the ICRW programmatic framework, a report by colleagues from Girls Not Brides USA laid out important considerations for where to focus programming in the area of child marriage.²⁴ Their framework provides the basis for selecting countries and sub-regions within those countries. They identify a set of factors that should guide the selection of places in which to invest, including:

- The burden of child marriage among girls under age 15, and under age 18
- Other development context data (maternal mortality, under-5 mortality, female adult literacy, the ratio of female to male school attendance, etc.)
- The presence of an enabling legal and governance environment, including measures of state fragility;
- The opportunity to strengthen complementary government and other donor initiatives to address child marriage

The framework provides concrete guidance on where investments in programming might be most effective.

Plan UK's report *Breaking Vows* links the prevention of child marriage closely with girls' opportunities to remain in school.²⁵ Its contribution to this review of the programmatic opportunities to end child marriage is to highlight the need to improve school quality and increase girls' school retention as the single most important intervention to invest in. Plan's affiliates in Asia have established the Asia Child Marriage Initiative, for which ICRW conducted a qualitative review of causes and conditions, and from which comparative data may start to emerge before long.²⁶

USAID's report and action plan on child marriage - *Ending Child Marriage and Meeting the Needs of Married Children: The USAID Vision for Action* - makes the special contribution of focusing on married children.²⁷ USAID intends to focus its investments in settings where the prevalence of child marriage is very high, and where disaster, instability or political change adversely affect adolescent girls. Includes a review of promising interventions. In collaboration with the London School of Tropical Hygiene and Medicine, the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health has produced a knowledge summary on the linkages between child marriage and maternal and child health.²⁸

Circumstances in fragile states may contribute to the vulnerability of girls to child marriage, and World Vision put out a report in 2013 on child marriage in humanitarian settings.²⁹ Based on data collected in Bangladesh, Somaliland, Niger, the author observes that families in conflict settings often view child marriage as especially protective of girls. This leads parents faced with crisis to marry girls earlier than they might in times of peace.

Rationale/Framing of Child Marriage and the Programs to Address It

In early 2013, the Council on Foreign Relations published a report on child marriage that focuses on the returns to investing in ending child marriage. The CFR report covers familiar territory but offers up a new rationale for US investment in child marriage. It argues that given that central importance given to gender equality in US foreign policy, the US should “raise child marriage more prominently in its diplomatic relations with affected states; increase funding to combat this practice; target its investments; and improve research, monitoring, and evaluation in this area. American leadership on child marriage will simultaneously raise the status of girls and advance critical U.S. foreign policy objectives around the world.”³⁰ The first step, the report argues, is to choose a select group of countries in which to focus its resources and from which to draw lessons about the impact of programs. The formulation of the child marriage as an issue of concern for foreign policy will bring in new audiences and likely facilitate discussions and actions on child marriage by high-level policymakers in the US.

The United Nations General Assembly’s Human Rights Council has produced a report on servile marriage as a contemporary form of slavery.³¹ The report defines servile marriages as those “in which a spouse is reduced to a commodity over whom any or all the powers of ownership are attached.... the root causes of servile marriage... include gender inequality, ideas of family honour, poverty, conflict and cultural and religious practices.” Numerous UN conventions that define the conditions under which marriage may be considered “servile.” The Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery of 1956 references, situations in which, “A woman, without the right to refuse, is promised or given in marriage on payment of a consideration in money or in kind to her parents, guardian, family or any person or group.”³² The provisions of Article 1 of this Supplementary Convention oblige states to abolish certain institutions and practices analogous to slavery which are referred to collectively as “servile status.”

Two other recent reports have focused on the conceptual and practical connections between slavery and child marriage. It really is not possible to state the purpose of the report of Anti-Slavery International better than they state it themselves: “Recognition of the links between marriage and slavery are largely absent from the debate on child marriage, despite growing awareness about the negative consequences of child marriage, especially for girls. Anti-Slavery International’s report highlights how child marriage can often operate as a shield behind which slavery and slavery-like practices occur with apparent impunity.”³³ Of particular interest in their report are discussions of both the issue of consent, and the nature of the marital relationship itself. Regarding entry into child marriage, they note that, “Children are in a weaker position to give free, full and informed consent to marriage than adults, even if they appear to ‘agree’ or do not express refusal. Children are less likely to be fully informed about the true nature or impact of marriage. The younger the child, the more vulnerable they will be, including when pressure to marry comes from their own parents or guardians.”

In a report on forced marriage in the Congo, Free the Slaves describes child marriage as one of four main factors underlying forced marriage.³⁴ Their case studies document the extent of forced marriage, “hidden in plain view.” The report notes that the military conflict in eastern DRC “has increased the vulnerability of women to forced marriage by creating a climate where there is limited rule of law. Armed combatants ignore laws with impunity, taking women and girls from their homes. Many community members, including wives in forced marriages, do not realize that the practice is illegal.” There is much to be done to educate and change attitudes regarding non-consensual marriage.

On the topic of consent, a recent legal study in the United States puts forward the new concept of “marital capacity” with the idea that this could usefully replace the current legal concept of consent.³⁵ The article argues that the concept of consent is inadequate in the context of marriage, and lays out in some detail the additional capacities required to sustain marriage. As the author states it, “This new conception recognizes adolescents’ and emerging adults’ cognitive abilities to understand and voluntarily consent to marriage, but also accounts for their psychosocial immaturity and incomplete acquisition of other abilities required to sustain modern marriage.”³⁶

A Coordinated Research Framework for Catalyzing an End to Child Marriage

The causes of child marriage and the interwoven social norms that support the practice make it difficult to change. What is more, as a communal institution that connects communities to a marriage market (or if this terminology seems to commoditize girls further, a marriage zone), child marriage cannot be eradicated by individual or family decisions alone. Indeed, scholar Gerry Mackie has used the metaphor of standing or sitting in a sports stadium to describe the process: though sitting is more comfortable and provides a better view for everyone, once people in the front rows stand up, everyone is obliged to stand.³⁷ Those sitting in the rear rows will then suffer individually if they choose to sit down. Thus it is with the marriage market where the costs of not following the rules and not doing what everyone else is – i.e., taking a chance that a son or daughter might never marry – are too great for families to contemplate, even when they would like to wait.

Framework for this Analysis

This concept paper reviews key threads in the existing research and programs to take a bird's-eye look at the child marriage field. It offers a strategic investment framework – in dialogue with programs – and recommendations for ending child marriage in a generation. Research and programs to end this practice must go hand in hand.

This next section outlines a four-part research investment framework, laying out some specific questions we need to be able to answer at each level. The narrative for each part of the framework has the same structure, identifying key themes that should influence our thinking about programming in that area, defining several key indicators for success in that arena, and providing specific recommendations for investments.

Current programs are contributing to delaying marriage among specific populations, but are insufficient for ending the practice, and certainly will not end it in one generation. Most programs focus at three levels, working with girls, the people around them, and the legal system and policies that affect their lives. Less attention has been paid to mitigating the impact of child marriage in the lives of girls, and to making the case at the highest levels so that child marriage comes to be seen as an important hindrance to development.

The investment framework proposed below advocates for additional research into four interrelated categories: programs that focus on girls themselves (prevention and mitigation), norm change, advocacy for legal and policy change on child marriage, and making the case that child marriage is a fundamental issue to address in the context of development (See Figure 1 - Research Investment Framework). Each section starts with a description of major conceptual or research issues in that area and moves on to enumerating key research questions.

The marriage zone is the unit at which we should be thinking about changing norms.³⁸ In smaller, endogamous communities, norm change work will have an impact on the local marriage zone. In most cases, however, programs are not geared toward shifting the marriage zone, and focus on sub-groups in the population without reference to the marriage zone. Marriage is a systems problem and it requires systems-based solutions. Even when programs do not address all of the domains in this framework, it is important to understand their position within the comprehensive system and to be explicit about why they have chosen one or more strategies in favor of others. This comprehensive/ systems approach reflects the reality that programs will more likely be successful and achieve scale when their position in the cultural and political system of a given marriage zone is clear.

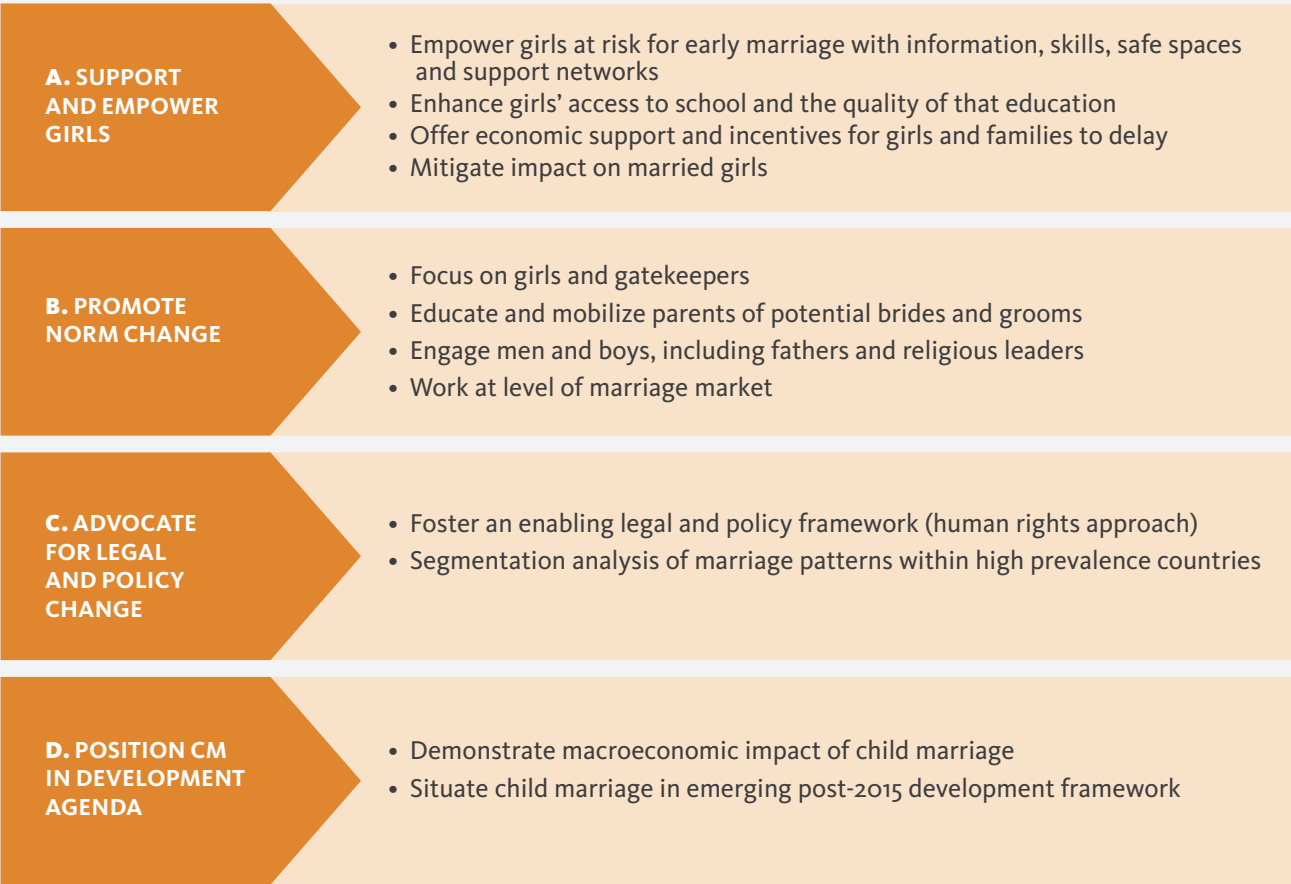
Although this framework represents each of these levels as distinct from the others, they influence each other iteratively and in important ways. Facilitating girls' schooling (A), for example, contributes to changing norms and expectations regarding for girls' education and marriage (B). Engaging parents and religious leaders in delaying marriage and in viewing the timing of marriage in new ways (B) can contribute to creating a favorable advocacy environment for legal and policy change (C). A favorable policy environment (C) can lead to improved investments in favor of girls and in the implementation of laws

that protect their human rights (A). Improvements in the lives of girls (A), when properly measured, contribute to the growing evidence of the importance of the costs and savings of delaying marriage and the importance of ending child marriage to furthering development goals (D). And so it goes.

Most important is to recognize that working at every level must be in service of girls, and in support of the realization of their rights and health. To reflect that set of values, the diagram at left may be more accurate. The advantage of this representation is that it visually captures the overlapping relationships, while placing investment in girls “at the center.” The drawback is that since we’re talking about investment and the relative weights of different areas in which change needs to happen, not everyone will agree with the interrelationships between the areas or how they figure here.

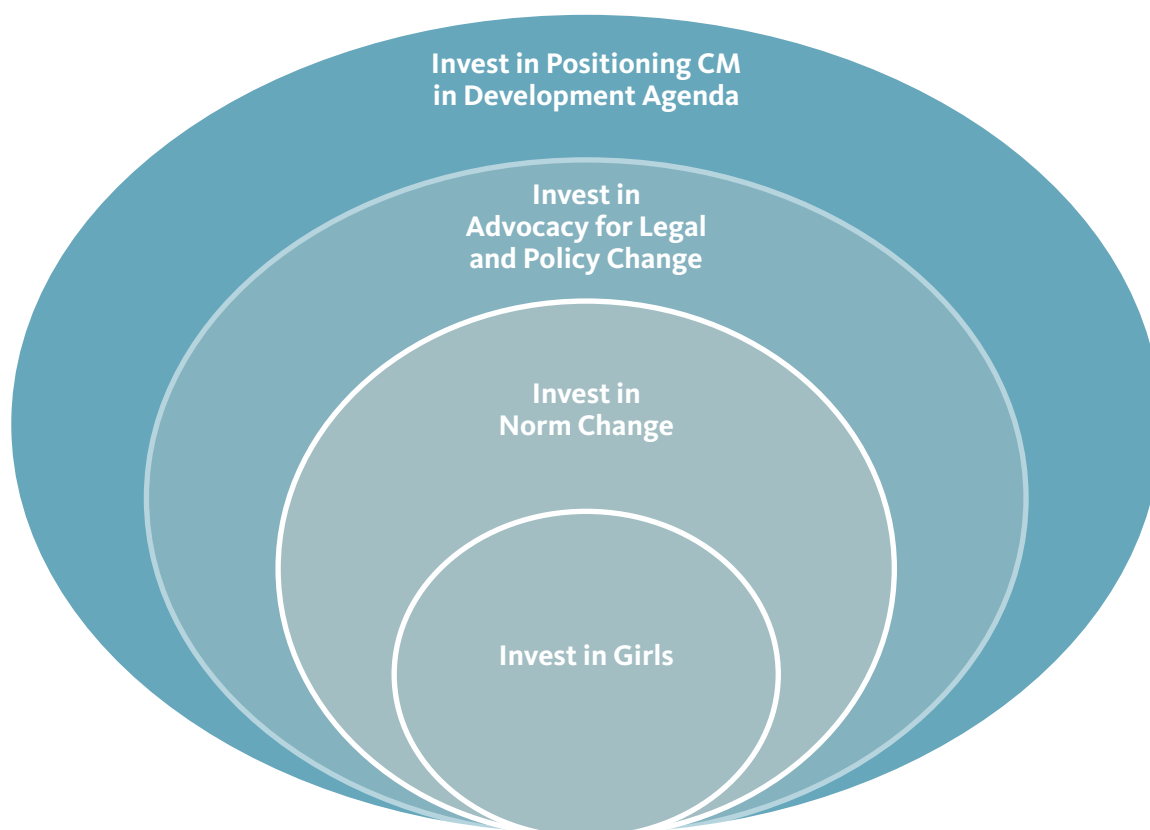
Each of the four sections A-D below begins with a description of key issues and themes to consider in future research.

Figure I. Investment Framework for Research and Programs



A. Investing in Girls Themselves

Should a movement focused on ending the practice of child marriage invest also in mitigating the impact of the practice? The overarching answer to this question seems to be yes. While most programs explicitly addressing child marriage focus on investing in unmarried girls, there is growing evidence that mitigating the impact of child marriage on young brides is also important: not only from the perspective of addressing the health and rights of married girls, but for contributing to preventing child marriage. The Tesfa program in Ethiopia currently being implemented by CARE and evaluated by ICRW will offer interesting results on this link between mitigation and prevention.³⁹ Tesfa focuses on mitigation, with strategies that promote young married women's economic engagement, savings and loans, engagement in paid employment, use of services, contraceptive use and knowledge. Preliminary findings indicate that the program has also been effective at preventing marriage.



Major Themes Related to Investing in Girls

Get specific about objectives and outcomes.

To encourage investment in what we know really works, we need precision on what we view as “what works,” how we are measuring “success.” Do programs contribute to reducing the practice of child marriage? Do programs stop at changing the attitudes of girls? Most often, programs stop at “wishes to marry later,” and do not measure girls’ capabilities or actual age at marriage. Is an incremental delay in age at marriage a sufficient measure of success? What about the quality of marital decision-making? Do programs focus on norm change among parents and communities and end up neglecting girls?

End child marriage in alignment with valued and viable alternatives.

What are the safe, viable and attractive alternatives for girls? Do programs invest in girls more broadly? Do we know what happens to girls who do not marry? Do laws reflect a national posture on the practice of child marriage and also provide commitment to investing in alternatives for girls? What are the unintended consequences for girls?

Ensure the wellbeing of girls engaged in economic activity.

In discussions around economic empowerment it is important to ensure the wellbeing of girls engaged in economic activity and not to view girls’ economic productivity as a panacea that can be taken up and carries no risks. One of the unintended consequences of economic activity is the risk of the “second shift” for girls and women, who are working for pay and still doing all of the domestic work, and risks of sexual harassment, etc.

Ensure that sexual and reproductive health education is part of these efforts to work with girls.

Otherwise work on child marriage sidesteps a major issue in girls’ lives, namely the possibility of becoming pregnant before marriage. And given the importance of pregnancy and childbearing in the lives of girls where child marriage is prevalent, girls must know how to manage their health and relationships.

Reach already-married girls.

Comparing the situation of girls with that of boys – some boys marry early, but marriage does not generally mean the end of investments in their human capital. What opportunities exist to change this expectation so that early marriage does not have to mean the end of schooling, job opportunities, and so on? How can schooling, mobility, contact with peers and so on be disassociated from marriage in ways that release girls from some of the harshest consequences of early marriage?

Ensure systematic evaluation of program impact on child marriage.

Few child marriage programs have been evaluated well, and many promising programs haven’t been evaluated at all. A number of programs whose primary goal is to provide education or livelihoods training do not measure child marriage as an outcome. “(This is underscored by a recent scan of programs in West Africa”

Evaluation challenges include the fact that the programmatic timeframe is usually sharply limited, making it hard to know whether girls did indeed remain unmarried until age 18, and what the impact of that delay is on their lives. Once girls marry, they often leave their communities, making it very difficult to see the potential contributions the programs have made to their married lives or to their communities. A final challenge is that the traditions and practices associated with child marriage in a particular setting may intensify or reduce the impact of the practice in that setting. This harkens back to the point about whether it is possible to disassociate or de-link other practices from child marriage, like leaving school or becoming pregnant early in life, to reduce their impact on the lives of girls. Many of the consequences of child marriage arise because of other practices associated with the transition to marriage.

A1. Invest in Girls' Schooling, Both Primary and Secondary Education

The correlation between girls' education and delayed marriage is clear, but the links and causality are complex: at the aggregate level, girls' educational achievement is associated with later age at first marriage, but early marriage does not lead systematically to dropping out of school, nor does dropping out of school lead straight to marriage. The perceived returns on schooling (not always accurate perceptions) affect the likelihood of staying in school, and this is relevant to child marriage.⁴⁰ More research on the specific causal pathways between girls' education and child marriage and its consequences are needed.

Priority research questions. *What key school-related factors contribute to some girls' successful transitions from primary to secondary school in communities where child marriage remains prevalent? Research should also clarify the role of including gender-equitable content at school on the lives of boys and girls, to tap the transformative potential of education (i.e., schools not just as holding places but empowering spaces). We know with some confidence that keeping girls in lower secondary and secondary school contributes to delaying marriage among individual girls. But these programs do not necessarily change the underlying norms. Investing in education is an important strategy, but it does not work for all girls, and is certainly not the only solution.*

A2. Invest in Vocational Training and Employment Opportunities as Deterrents to Early Marriage

We need to know more about the role of vocational training and employability of young girls as a deterrent to early marriage.

Priority research questions: *What have we learned about the rise in age at marriage as a consequence of the place girls have found in employment, for example, the garment industry in settings like Bangladesh and Cambodia? Is it the experience of work or the cash itself that makes the difference in the lives of girls in a given setting? We know that girls have been able to contribute to family income and save for their own dowries, transforming them from economic liabilities into assets.⁴¹ But are there lasting effects on the quality of these girls' marriages, on norms relating to the timing of marriage in general, on girls' decision-making, or on their childbearing? Does their experience contribute to changing norms around the timing of marriage among girls who have not worked?*

A3. Investing at Scale Through (Conditional) Cash Transfers

Around the world, cash transfers and vouchers designed to alter a variety of behaviors and outcomes are gaining credibility. Placing conditional cash payments directly in girls' hands, for example, can help them take fewer risks in their sexual behavior and relationships.⁴² The big question is whether and how this approach can not only delay marriage but also empower girls and give them other opportunities. The Punjab Female School Stipend Program in Pakistan increased girls' chances of progressing through and completing middle school.⁴³ In addition, participating girls seemed to be delaying their marriages and to be having fewer cumulative births by age 19. Cultural traditions and social norms in Pakistan are such that it is difficult for girls to resist the pressures of marriage and childbearing, no matter how much they might wish to. While CCTs are a promising mechanism for improving health or education outcomes, they are not necessarily promoting gender equality or empowering girls.⁴⁴

Indian "investment" programs to discourage son preference and encourage the care and education of daughters may hold promise. These state programs distribute bonds to girls in poor households that they can access only at age 18 if they have finished a certain number of years of school and are still unmarried. An interim evaluation of one program showed that it improved the sex ratio of surviving children and increased investments in girls' human capital and health, but did not increase school attendance.⁴⁵ Critics have observed that the program in some ways amounts to a subsidy of girls' dowries, which may send the wrong message to families with daughters.⁴⁶ Like the CCTs described above, these programs have not been accompanied by any effort to transform norms around gender equality, sexuality and rights. If they have an effect on child marriage, does it matter if these norms do not change?

Priority research questions: *What are the impacts of cash transfer programs, with and without conditions, on delaying child marriage? Do CCT programs have greater impact when they reach girls only, girls and mothers only, or whole families? Do they contribute to changing norms about the value and roles of girls, or do they simply alter the economic calculus regarding specific behaviors of the individual girls who participate in them? Could CCTs be designed in a way that is more supportive of norm change? Could programs like the investment schemes in India ultimately contribute to changing norms around gender equality, sexuality and marriage?*

A5. Reaffirm the Need to Address Gender, Sexuality and Rights in Programs for Girls

Are education and asset building enough to make change possible, or is it important to include gender and sexuality in the mix of programming? One assumption about later marriage is that it leads to more egalitarian relationships and greater marriage quality (i.e., as conditioned by less of an age gap between girls and their husbands, participation in decision-making, access to and control over resources, the ability to leave if there is the threat of violence, and so on). Is this actually the case? (Note: The topic of sexuality is addressed further in Section B in the discussion of norm change.)

Do program components on gender, sexuality and rights make a difference to delaying marriage or just to how well prepared girls are for marriage? What is the mechanism through which this program approach operates?

A6. Invest in Mitigating the Impact of Early Marriage on the Lives of Girls

Work on ending child marriage has to also address issues of those girls who, as the transition takes place, will still be marrying young. Married adolescent girls have been a neglected population in the fight to end child marriage and protect children.⁴⁷ Their social isolation and limited community exposure makes young wives extremely hard to reach. Anti-Slavery International has highlighted both their treatment within marriage (many children have no control over their movements or their person within marriage, are controlled through violence and threats and experience isolation and loneliness.⁴⁸ In addition, they may be unable to leave marriages, being unable to support themselves financially or living in fear of repercussions from in-laws, their families and their communities. At the same time, research has shown that age at marriage is one of the strongest predictors of subsequent divorce, and that young-marriers who divorce are likely to find themselves in unfavorable economic circumstances.⁴⁹ Women married as children are also vulnerable to a set of poorer health and fertility-related outcomes – high fertility, close birth spacing unwanted pregnancies, pregnancy termination and sterilization – controlling for other factors, including duration of marriage.⁵⁰ We need to learn more about girls' specific needs and the opportunities to reduce their health-related risks and social vulnerabilities.

Priority research questions: *What do we know about the quality of marriage and how it can be influenced by investing in girls? Do girls who marry a few years later actually experience marriages of “higher quality” along the lines discussed above? How can girls be prepared for marriage with information about what to expect, communication and negotiation skills? As part of improving marriage quality, how can girls who have had a first birth continue to be supported in protecting their health and delaying second or higher order pregnancies?⁵¹*

What is the impact of programs that ensure human capital development (schooling or other training) after marriage and childbearing? What have experiences of continuing schooling after marriage and childbearing as in South Africa or Iran taught us?⁵² In communities where child marriage is prevalent, how can education, life-skills training, health promotion, and economic empowerment programs be tailored to meet married adolescents' needs?

What are the levels and consequences of divorce for young women? Research in Ethiopia suggests that levels of divorce, particularly in specific regions, are higher for girls who marry very young.⁵³ Is this negative consequence one that could move policymakers?

How do programs that mitigate the impact of child marriage on girls' lives contribute to preventing child marriage? What role might sisters-in-law and mothers-in-law play in encouraging clinic visits, conveying solidarity, or explaining contraceptive methods, for example?

A7. Invest in Identifying the Unintended Consequences of Delaying Marriage

Delaying marriage can potentially offer many benefits to girls. However, within the communities where child marriage remains most prevalent, we need to develop a deeper understanding about both the benefits and potential negative effects of delaying marriage. If the benefits are clear, what are the barriers to shifting the practice? Research on the Kishori Abhijan program in Bangladesh, for example, showed that girls who delayed marriage ended up paying much higher dowries, a hardship for poor families.⁵⁴

Priority research questions: *What are the real-life prospects for girls who do not marry very young and what barriers associated with delayed marriage do they face? What are the alternatives for girls, specifically, do they have other means of securing the social and economic assets that marriage presumably confers? Are there norm shifts taking place around sexual behavior or virginity as a consequence of the growing gap between puberty and marriage? Are girls becoming sexually active if they delay marriage, and what are the implications of this? Are their future husbands sexually active before marriage, if it is delayed?*

B. Promoting Norm Change

Everyone participates in enacting and reinforcing social norms. In order to change profoundly rooted norms that relate to gender, age and social position requires a strategy that addresses girls, their families, other gatekeepers and communities at large. Who are these gatekeepers? They are the individuals whose opinions on girls' schooling, domestic roles, safety, religious practice, sexual relationships and place in society determine the timing and nature of those girls' marriages. Girls themselves have opinions on when and to whom they marry and what they hope for from those relationships. But often more important are the grandmother who believes that girls must start their domestic lives early in order to be competent, successful adults; the parish priest who wants to see girls "protected" from nonmarital sexual relations and whose work hinges on weddings; the father who sees the family's social standing resting on how good a match he can make for his daughter, and soon; the mother who worries about the economic impact on the family of having that daughter in the house for one month longer than need be; and the teacher, who doesn't take female students seriously because he expects they will be leaving school soon to marry in any case.

Gender transformative programming will be an important element of this strategy, though it is clearly not enough by itself. The social commitment to child marriage involves values and choices that go beyond gender norms and involve worldviews on family economics, honor, respect for elders, ethnic identity and so on.

Major Themes Relating to Norm Change

Girl-focused vs. gatekeeper approach

Norm change has to take place with everyone. People working to end child marriage must be conscious of the inherent trade-offs between taking a girl-focused approach and working with gatekeepers. Both lines of work are important, preferably in tandem; indeed, it may not be viable or ethical to work with girls without engaging gatekeepers. Still, it is important to measure the impact of work with others on girls, not just the impact on the attitudes of those around girls.

Attitudes vs. behavior/practices for women and men

Programs that engage gatekeepers to shift norms cannot solely focus on attitudinal changes. Changed attitudes regarding child marriage often do not translate into changes in fathers' and mothers' self-reported or externally verified practices, yet they are critical to prevention efforts. We need to know more about the relationship between changes in attitudes and changes in behaviors. This is a challenge the movement to engage men and boys in gender equality has been struggling with for some time: this need to “triangulate” boys' and men's self-reported attitudinal and behavioral change and confirm these reports with those of the women and girls in their lives.⁵⁵

Secondary gatekeepers

Traditional gatekeepers include mothers, fathers and religious leaders. Others in communities also have influence. Who are they, and might peers, husbands and married girls themselves contribute to breaking cycles of child marriage in a generation?

The social construction of sexuality needs to be addressed directly.

The social science research on marriage practices around the world has demonstrated the centrality of sexuality, how it is defined for males and females, and how important the social and biological transitions affecting sexuality are in adolescence. Yet programs relating to norm change do not generally address this elephant in the room. Shifting the meaning of sexuality offers an enormous opportunity. It is one part of the kind of comprehensive sexuality education that human rights and public health professionals have long advocated for.

Need to map marriage zones as a consistent practice.

Most programs focus on a specific population of girls or gatekeepers but do not start program design by conducting a mapping exercise of the marriage zone for a particular village or province. Given what we have learned in recent years about the impossibility of changing individual behavior when others to whom a family is tied are not also changing theirs, this kind of mapping is essential. (Note: Tostan may be an example of a program where indeed a strong awareness of the marriage zone has guided implementation.)⁶⁵

B1. Invest in Raising Parental Awareness of the Benefits of Staying in School and the Costs of Leaving

Informing parents about the positive returns to education has been shown to increase family investment in education, which in turn promotes school attendance. Relatively inexpensive, measurable education interventions in various settings could be extended to test the idea that the commitment to schooling would translate into delayed marriage.⁵⁶

On the costs side of the equation, recent research has shown definitively the harm to girls' social capital that is brought about by very early marriage. Using DHS data from sub-Saharan Africa, Nguyen and Wodon estimate the impact of early marriage on literacy and educational attainment and find that for every year a girl marries before age 18, her chances of being literate, having some secondary schooling or completing secondary school declines significantly.⁵⁷

Women's health also benefits from marrying later. As noted in the discussion on the lives of married girls, child marriage brings about a series of negative health effects that last into women's adulthood.⁵⁸

Research in Uganda found that women who marry at age 18 later were more likely to be paid in cash for their labor, more likely to participate in joint decisions regarding health and household spending, have greater mobility, and were less likely to have experienced spousal violence.⁵⁹

Priority research gap/questions: *Is schooling/extending education the best solution for delaying marriage? What precisely do we know about these connections? And how can parents be influenced to keep girls in school? What are the most effective settings and strategies for raising awareness among parents? Do positive community conversations with mothers and fathers such as those that various organizations have created promote attitudes and behaviors toward daughters and delaying marriage that can be sustained and developed at scale?⁶⁰ Do these programs create long-term norm change in the community and if so, what level of 'saturation' is needed?*

B2. Invest in Evaluating Community Discussions and Human Rights Training in Support of Girls' Rights

Entire communities – civil society groups, parents, girls, law enforcement and religious leaders – have been mobilized to support girls' rights and child marriage laws. Many organizations have adopted this strategy in different ways but the impact of most programs on child marriage has yet to be fully evaluated. There are several main models for community-based interventions: some focus on human rights, others on enforcement,⁶¹ on the benefits of schooling for girls,⁶² on care for girls⁶³, on rational self interest,⁶⁴ and so on. But few have strong evaluations and some key questions remain across this approach in general.

Priority research gap/questions: *Where are there current investments that we could potentially add onto? Two large programs present particular opportunity for this:*

Tostan in Senegal has recently been applying its three-year Community Empowerment Program to the issue of child marriage. Tostan collaborated with UNICEF and the Population Council on a qualitative evaluation of the earlier incarnation of the Community Empowerment Program, and it is currently working with PATH on a randomized control trial of the intervention.⁶⁵ An impact evaluation for the child marriage elements of the intervention is not yet in place, and this could be an area for investment.

The Stepping Stones curriculum, which mobilizes communities by age and sex "quadrants" (i.e., young men, older men, young women, older women) to solve their own problems, has been proven successful in reducing the spread of HIV and gender-based violence.⁶⁶ What if this approach were adapted to child marriage? What else from the HIV and GBV fields can be adapted to ending child marriage?

B3. Invest in Working with Men and Boys

The evidence on the importance of engaging men and boys in promoting health, reducing violence and achieving gender equality has grown considerably over the last fifteen years. Involving men and boys in development programs can lead to significant and measurable improvements in attitudinal and behavioral outcomes for men and boys.⁶⁷ The impact of this work on women and girls is less well established and measured.

To date, little work with men and boys has been done within the context of child marriage. Efforts to influence men's preferences with regard to marriage have not been pursued systematically, nor have programs that try to influence the quality of marriage to mitigate the impact of early marriage. Young boys at risk of child marriage are increasingly acknowledged, yet they are largely neglected in research

and programming and we know little about them. The few examples of work with men and boys stand out and suggest that there is much more to be done.⁶⁸

Priority research questions: *What have been the most successful efforts to change norms among men – fathers, community leaders, religious leaders and others – that could be scaled up to cover entire marriage markets or zones? What is the impact on girls/young women of programs that focus on men/boys? What is the impact of combined programs that work with both sexes? How does working with boys and young men translate into the quality of their marriages?*

B4. Invest in ‘Positive Deviance’ in Efforts to Engage Gatekeepers

Positive deviance is based on the idea that in every place, specific individuals or groups – facing the same limited resources and challenges as everyone else – engage in uncommon behaviors and strategies that enable them to find better solutions to problems than their peers. In the context of child marriage, this might mean families who take steps to keep their daughters in school or who resist the pressures to marry their daughters as early as others. Opportunities exist to apply this framework to specific gatekeepers within many communities where organizations have been implementing interventions. Recent research on informal literacy training among mothers suggests that it may contribute to delaying daughters’ marriages through the mechanisms of changes in these literate women’s communication skills, their ability to influence family decisions, and their knowledge about women’s legal rights and children’s health.⁶⁹

Priority research gap/questions: *What values and beliefs held by community members and leaders allow them to champion girls’ rights, education and delayed marriage? At the girl, family, community and gatekeeper level, what do we know about those who resist early marriage compared to those who do not? How might lessons learned contribute to peer-to-peer dissemination of such messaging with the faith-based community, for example? How could the positive deviance approach be applied to other “gatekeepers” including fathers and adult women who were once child brides themselves?*

B5. Replicate Macro-Level Norm Change Lessons From Other Fields

Most of the examples here have focused on changing norms at the community level. What are the opportunities to shift norms on a larger scale? Tina Rosenberg’s recent book *Join the Club* recounts many experiences from around the world of the use of peer pressure in various forms to promote social change and improve health and well-being.⁷⁰ In her view, this form of influence could easily eclipse any other programmatic intervention to end child marriage. On another tack, national debate could be promoted through the mass media, through the leadership of public figures, and through destigmatization. We have learned a few things from other government and civil society initiatives:

Box 2.

Special Topic: The Safety and Security of Groups Working on these Topics

In 2005, the World Health Organization and PATH published the groundbreaking *Researching Violence against Women: A Practical Guide for Researchers and Activists*. It laid out the risks to women, their family members and researchers. It provided guidelines on how to minimize those risks and collect quality data by laying the groundwork for conducting this research and putting mechanisms to ensure the safety and security of anyone participating in the research. There is much that can be extrapolated from that experience, but the same sort of guide would make a useful contribution in the child marriage field, where programs to end child marriage challenge long-held norms and expectations and it is possible to anger people who do not want to see change. See also the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

Soul City's work on domestic violence is potentially a great example for the child marriage field.⁷¹ They worked on implementation of the Domestic Violence Act through advocacy, public education (distributing over a million booklets about the Act), and an emotion-based television series, thereby touching on several aspects of the framework at once. The campaign was successful in achieving implementation of the Domestic Violence Act, which had been passed a year earlier but had not been acted upon. Did it have a measurable effect on reducing domestic violence, and is this an appropriate measure of success for a national-level awareness campaign? What lessons are relevant for working to end child marriage?

Priority research gap/questions: *What can the child marriage field learn from some of the accomplishments in others, including female genital cutting (especially on the importance of working at the community level), vesico-vaginal fistula (especially on destigmatization), and gender-based violence (especially on the impact of enforcement)? How can efforts to change norms in those fields shine light on ending child marriage? How did work to change attitudes eventually change people's behavior as well? How could we contribute to the ongoing research in these other fields?*

C. Advocating for Legal and Policy Change

Major Themes Relating to Advocacy for Legal and Policy Change

Which legal and policy changes are most strategic and needed can vary greatly.

Establishing the minimum age at marriage is obviously the first and most important step a country can take toward ending child marriage, but most countries have done this, often with little impact. The question is what comes next, and what legal changes really make a difference?

Legal and policy changes in other, related areas can make a difference to child marriage.

Other changes, such as laws ensuring girls' right to school even if they are pregnant, protecting girls and women from violence, and ensuring that women and girls can inherit land and other assets, can be very important in driving behavioral changes in child marriage.

Tracking indirect investment in child marriage (e.g., in education or health) is difficult.

Tracking investments in child marriage prevention that are concealed within other sectors presents challenges when we wish to attribute improved outcomes to specific investments. Incentives to stay in school, for example, may have a strong effect on child marriage but are generally not evaluated for their impact on child marriage.

Policy development, implementation and evaluation

Once legal frameworks (laws, policies, and regulations) reflect international human rights standards, the challenge of evaluating the impact of policy implementation and accountability at all levels remains. The accountability mechanisms currently in place to address child marriage reflect an emphasis on redress and punishment only after marriage has occurred. These mechanisms could be far more diverse, from an insistence on birth registration, to document girls' age at school, to tracking girls who leave school, and so on.

C1. Invest in Building Legal Frameworks to Advance Prevention

Most legal frameworks regarding child marriage focus on the punitive responses to child marriage. Indeed, such accountability is a critical part of ending child marriage. However, an approach that emphasizes criminalization may inhibit willing collaboration with legal reform, force the practice underground (and out of regulation, making it more dangerous), and may harm the rights of vulnerable people. In India, for example, the law against child marriage is punitive – it punishes the boy, putting him in a juvenile home, punishes the parents and treats the girl as a victim; in the eyes of her community, however, she may be “spoilt” and have difficulty re-integrating or marrying in future. Focusing on the legal response to criminal activity once child marriage has taken place or when it is in process, neglects the ways legal frameworks and accountability can contribute to preventing child marriage.

Most countries have laws preventing marriage before the age of 18, yet almost all countries grant exceptions, for example, with parental consent (e.g., minimum age at marriage in the state of New Hampshire, for example, is 13 for girls, 14 for boys, with parental consent). Many countries, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and South Asia, fail to enforce existing laws. Human rights and legal advocacy organizations have sought through legal activism to strike at a culture of impunity where the violation of adolescent girls' rights is concerned.⁷²

Two realities systematically undermine the rights of children, not only with regard to child marriage: 1) The privileging of customary law over State law against child marriage in settings where both exist. Bales and colleagues have begun mapping specific practices around the world by the presence of parallel legal systems, finding that the existence of customary law is associated with human rights abuses in various areas⁷³; and 2) The privileging of adult rights over children's rights. We need context-specific research on the ways that in their drafting and implementation, legal frameworks establish hierarchies between children's rights and adult/parental rights.

Priority research questions: *How do legal mechanisms work for preventing child marriage? Could the formal validation of legally uncertain child marriages once girls turn 18 be a strategy of interest? What are the inroads for effective advocacy in cases of customary law, as measured by legal and policy changes adhered to at the community level? What is the relationship between legal age of consent to sex and legal age at marriage? How are legal mechanisms to end child marriage implemented at the community level? What are good examples of increasing compliance with the law by requiring marriage registration and making any problems with marriages the responsibility of government officials? What have we learned from work on child sexual assault?*

How does the passage of and compliance with compulsory education or sex education laws for girls affect their vulnerability to child marriage? What about the vigorous implementation of laws against sexual harassment and abuse in school and work settings, and the way that ensuring girls' safety opens up their choices? Can broader support for girls' rights, including their schooling and economic roles, contribute to reducing girls' vulnerability to child marriage in settings where the legal minimum age at marriage is 18?

C2. Invest in Promoting High-Level Leadership for National Response to Child Marriage

An increased awareness that individuals' health and educational achievement are not directly the result of factors within their control has generated significant investment into “systems-level research.” The same framework might be adapted to better understand the effectiveness of legal mechanisms whose aim is to end child marriage.

Priority research questions: *How can we measure the impact of having ministers or other leaders profile success for each other on the legal and policy issues surrounding child marriage? As mentioned earlier, what are the characteristics of those “positive deviants” whose words and role modeling have an impact on reducing child marriage? How can we expect to measure the impact of high-level leadership on child marriage?*

C3. Invest in Segmentation Analysis for Targeted Advocacy at the National Level

As a cultural practice, child marriage – its prevalence and intensity – varies within countries, not just among them. Lessons learned and methodologies from segmentation analysis conducted in development (e.g., health outcomes) could illuminate telling differences in how child marriage uniquely affects girls from different social strata, ethnicity, or place of residence, among other factors. This research could contribute to inform targeted advocacy efforts for legal and policy change.

Priority research questions: Who should be targeted to win a given group over to the need to end child marriage? What are the most powerful messages when significant variability exists and the case might be made from several angles for the importance of ending child marriage.

D. Invest in Making the Case that Child Marriage is a Central Issue in Development

Major Themes Relating to Positioning Child Marriage as Central to Development

Ending child marriage fulfills most of the principles of the post-2015 development framework and there is urgency to act on this.

Human rights, poverty eradication, gender and other forms of equity, social justice, all of these values and principles are addressed by ending child marriage. What is more, ending child marriage also fits the bill for the requirement that priority activities be mutually reinforcing.

It is necessary to work to challenge the “cultural defense” argument for child marriage.

The “cultural defense”/cultural relativism argument has rarely been raised as vociferously as it has in relation to the practice of child marriage.

A case must be made that brings together all of the arguments below:

- Human rights standards and their universal application, including to minor girls;
- Evidence on the practices of elites versus poorer people in their same settings;
- Evidence on the negative impact of child marriage on development;
- Evidence on how widespread the practice is in various forms across religious groups and geographic regions.

Child marriage may be thought of as a governance problem.

A major population group is being excluded from the good things that others in society may enjoy, and this group has no voice and no recourse. The persistence of child marriage in the face of legal minimum ages at marriage makes a lie of human rights protections for girls.

Child marriage has important implications for population momentum.

This paper touched on this point earlier. The timing of marriage has important implications at the aggregate level for population growth and momentum, since childbearing tends to follow so immediately after early marriage. The timing of marriage – and the benefits of delaying it – are thus an important factors to be taken into consideration in national planning.

D1. Invest in Demonstrating the Impact of Child Marriage on Development, Population Health and the Economy

Much is known about the effects of child marriage on the lives of individual girls, and this evidence has pressed governments to take some action. However, the impact of child marriage on development and economic growth remain somewhat abstract. Even the impact of child marriage on the spread of HIV has not systematically been appreciated and addressed. This fact is a missed opportunity for advocacy aimed at decision-makers who allocate funds for public, social and development programs.

Priority research questions: *What is the economic impact of delaying child marriage? The evidence from research on early pregnancy and childbearing is very strong and some of it can be applied directly to early pregnancy and childbearing.⁷⁴ Girls' unpaid labor is so extensive, can we really say they are being "taken away" from economic opportunity? Is there economic evidence to show that delaying marriage among girls has a positive effect on economic productivity and development? To what extent does evidence on the returns to keeping girls in school and preventing early pregnancy⁷⁵ make the case against child marriage as well? When unemployment is high is there any economic disadvantage to girls' marrying young?⁷⁶ Answering these questions requires a cost-effectiveness analysis like those that have been used to demonstrate the importance of investing in family planning and HIV prevention.*

D.2. Advance Geographical Variety in the Evidence as Part of "Making the Case"

Making the case at the global level requires geographical variety in the research on child marriage and its different expressions worldwide. Indigenous girls in Central America and southern Mexico are especially discriminated against, for example, and have very high rates of child marriage.⁷⁷

Priority research questions: *It may be strategic to conduct a review that makes the connections between these life events among girls in greatly varied settings. There is a larger case to be made on the pre-eminence of sexuality and reproduction in the lives of girls and the ways in which this cultural and societal pattern keeps girls from realizing their human rights. What are the connections between high adolescent pregnancy outside marriage, informal marriage and cohabitation, and child marriage across all social and cultural contexts?*

Box 3. Special Topic with Implications for Geographical Variety: Child Marriage in Conflict Settings

So many young people live in settings where conflict is or has recently taken place. Recent research describes a couple of distinct responses to crisis. In the first instance, 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 dishonor, 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" (Myers 2013).

In the second instance, poverty, the separation of family members and lack of alternatives for young people exacerbated by conflict "profoundly affected the views, perceptions and behaviors of youth around relationships and marriage... Formal traditional marriage had largely

been replaced by sexual partnerships that may lead to informal marriages, often at an early age" (Schlecht et al 2013).

Myers, J. 2013. *Untying The Knot: Exploring Early Marriage in Fragile States*. London: World Vision UK.
Jennifer Schlecht, Elizabeth Rowley, Juliet Babirye. 2013. "Early relationships and marriage in conflict and post-conflict settings: Vulnerability of youth in Uganda." *Reproductive Health Matters* 21(41):234–242.

D.3. Invest Deeply in Priority Countries or Provinces

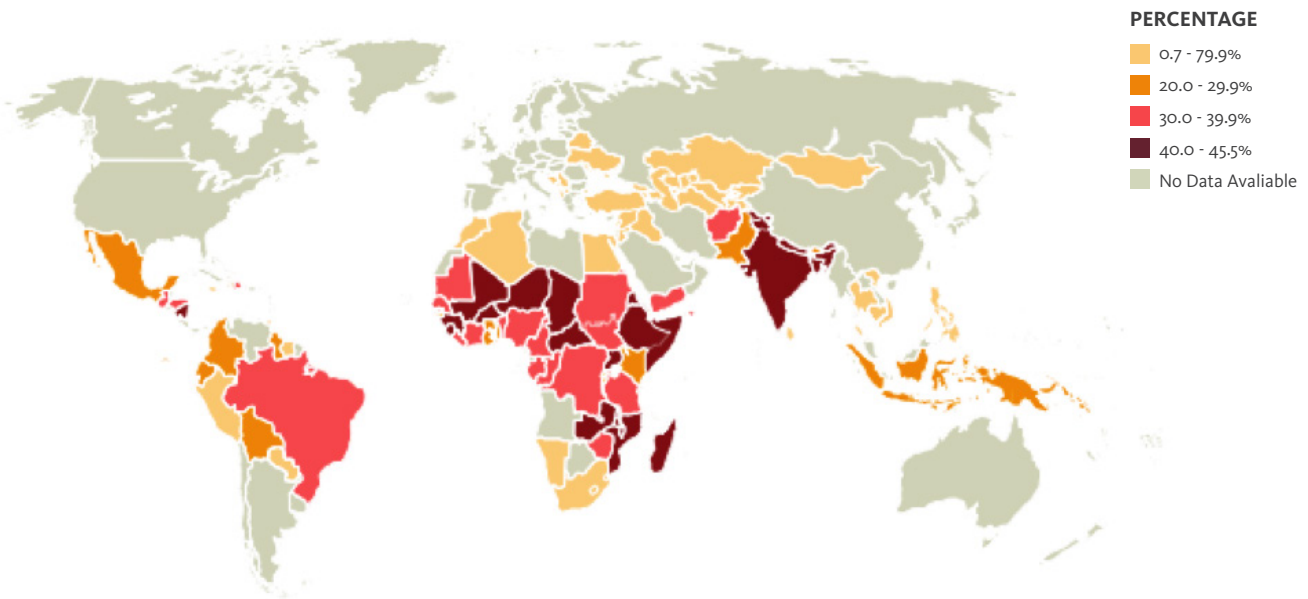
At the same time, the top-20 “hot spot” countries are known, and funds should continue to support programmatic research in these places. The Council on Foreign Relations report and others have argued for strategic, deep investment in specific national and sub-national settings. Settings with a high prevalence of child marriage – and with large numbers of girls at risk of marrying as children – offer the opportunity to coordinate prevention and mitigation programs aimed at girls, gatekeepers, legal and policy change, and at national advocacy. The intensity of programming may contribute to bringing about a tipping point.

With the publication of the UNFPA report in 2012, we have quite recent and reliable data to guide a focus on specific geographic hotspots where child marriage is particularly prevalent (see map below, which shows the significant variation among countries within a given region). Working together from different angles in specific regions could catalyze change in ending the practice of child marriage. It would be advantageous to create collaborations that include girl-focused programs, community norm change efforts, legal and institutional advocacy, and evaluation in hotspot areas; and of added value to support coordinated activities or a combination intervention in several hotspots.

***Priority research questions:** What is necessary to bring about a tipping point? We face a challenge in conceptualizing and measuring the “synthesis” effect of programming work at various levels at the same time. If we made a heavy investment in a country at multiple levels, what would be our research agenda?*

Rates of Child Marriage Show Wide Variations Within Regions

MAP 2: Percentage of woman 20-24 years old who were married or in union by age 18, 2000-2011



SOURCE: UNFPA REPORT, *MARRYING TOO YOUNG: END CHILD MARRIAGE*. 2012.

D.4. Invest in Finding Models for Mobilizing Girls and the Voices of Young Married Women

Girls themselves usually wish to marry later and view the interruption of their schooling as a loss.⁷⁸ But this is not always the case, especially depending on cultural context. Erin Murphy-Graham has done some interesting work on early marriage and girls' desires in Honduras.⁷⁹ It would be very interesting to understand girls' desire and agency vis-à-vis sexuality and family formation in different settings. We need to know more in this area, but don't always ask girls themselves what they wish for.

Priority research questions: What do girls think/want, what do they see as their options and the consequences of their choices? If they are not married, then what choices do they have?

Analysis and Discussion

This document is intended to contribute to the creation of a coherent vision or “strategic plan” for research investment, one that brings together the mandates emerging from priority research topics, geographic hotspots, partner commitments, and global advocacy opportunities.

The author was asked to present recommendations according to specific audiences: donors, policy-makers, advocates, practitioners. The research focus, however, does not lend itself to this exercise. The recommendations are directed in a general way at practitioners, advocates, researchers and donors, the full set of constituencies whose work drives the generation of evidence on what it takes to end child marriage.

The entire purpose of this effort is to develop a shared vision that will facilitate people's working together. The hope is that everyone can see themselves in this mapping of what must be done to end child marriage in a generation.

Developing a Shared Vision for Measurement

One more area in which this kind of research collaboration can strengthen the entire child marriage field is in driving the collection of common indicators across different kinds of programs working to end child marriage. Programs and researchers need ideally to be collecting a consistent set of outcome measures across programs of different kinds. The link between all programs should be an impact evaluation framework that lays out the concepts and calls for measurements using the same indicators.

This is a worthy goal to aspire to, and it is important to lay out some shared expectations and principles to follow. Colleagues involved in this consultative process over the past year have made a number of recommendations:

- At whatever level we are working to end child marriage, girls must remain at the center, as we “Define and evaluate change at the level of the girl, as well as her family and community, over time. It is important that we view positive changes for girls as the ultimate outcome of our efforts. Changing social norms requires working with and through family and community members; however, it is important that girls are seen as the ultimate “clients” of collective efforts. As such, indicators must be developed and tracked that capture changes at the level of individual girls.”⁸⁰
- Decisions are often made for girls under law, tradition and cultural practices. Our goals must reflect girls' age at marriage, yes; but they must also reflect our commitment to free and informed consent.
- This approach reflects an emphasis on accountability. We require measures of the impact on girls at each level of the model for accountability, especially if we do not measure the impact of specific activities on child marriage itself.

- The indicators should unite us around what we want to achieve, and not only what we want to prevent. Our ultimate objectives regarding child marriage should be defined in a universal frame that is relevant across and within countries. This should reflect the realization of girls' potential and the achievement of their health and rights. As part of this effort, we must consciously shift the focus from preventing the outcome to preventing the underlying causes of child marriage.
- Where possible, let us frame our objectives in terms that make sense at both the global and local levels. For example, how does the concept of “servile marriage” translate into a locally meaningful measure?
- Ensure that any shared indicators align with other similar efforts, such as those by Girls Not Brides USA, the Coalition for Adolescent Girls, and others.

The table below provides an initial take on the kinds of data we want programs to be collecting more consistently. This list serves only as a conversation starter, as developing a set of indicators that we can all use may take a while and is beyond the scope of this paper.

Specific Data-Related Asks

Collect sex- and age-disaggregated data

Advocate for district-level disaggregated data

Collect data by religion, socioeconomic status, place of residence, education, etc.

Focus on the impact on girls as our focus

Emphasize hotspots: include double and triple hotspots—places where multiple dimensions of vulnerability overlap—as very specific places to start where we can have the greatest impact on the lives of the most vulnerable

Collect data on innovative families' and communities' primary motivations for changing behavior regarding child marriage. Do such data exist? Have any polls or surveys covered this? Was it the influence of religious leaders? Grandmothers? Shifts in the marriage market? Desire to have girls complete school?

Establish a Consistent Set of Indicators to Measure Across Different Kinds of Programs

DOMAINS	ILLUSTRATIVE INDICATORS
Child Marriage-Related Outcomes	
Age at marriage Capture depth and severity Consent Education Fertility/childbearing Sexual debut	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consent • % married by age 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 • % in school at age 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 • % with child by age 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 • Cumulative fertility by age 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 • Interval between first, second and third births • Number of children by age 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 • Divorce rates by age 17, 18, 19, 20
A. Invest in Girls	
Assets programs Education programs Life skills programs Sexual and reproductive health Mitigation programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are evaluation components of interest to other fields? • At what grade do girls complete? • What are girls' competencies?
B. Invest in Norm Change	
Girls' preferences on CM, education Parental preferences Attitudes of leaders Aggregate levels of CM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mean age at which girls say they want to marry • Mean age at which mothers/fathers want daughters to marry • Mean age boys want wives to be when they marry • Cost of dowry/brideprice (trend will show normative change) • Families support girls' rights and education
C. Invest in Advocacy for Legal and Policy Change	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of countries with minimum ages at marriage of 16+ • Number of countries that have taken steps toward implementation of minimum age at marriage laws • Number of countries that have established a system of recourse for girls married before the minimum age at marriage • Number of countries that have successfully prevented or prosecuted instances of child marriage • Number of countries with competing customary law system
D. Invest in Positioning Child Marriage in Development Agenda	
Policy inclusion of child marriage issue Expenditure/investment Institutional engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicators relating to child marriage/girl children in post-2015 development framework • Number of major international events • Sector-specific conferences where child marriage is cited as contributing to the outcome of interest • See Girls Not Brides M&E framework when it is complete

Conclusions

In general, the child marriage field is strong on describing the problem... and weaker on sharing success stories of the myriad responses that are being tried in diverse settings. Mobilization around the problem of child marriage has been very successful. A shared vision and narrative of the promising or successful program examples at all levels will help drive resources toward programs and research that will contribute to ending child marriage.

A high-level perspective is needed to unite the field for a more strategic push to end child marriage, a perspective that donors are well-situated to play. A high-level perspective can easily be seen to include the development and dissemination of a shared theory of change. Other institutions working in the child marriage space also have much to contribute.

In the longer term, this kind of partnership can facilitate collaboration and coordination in program research. A consensus is developing that bringing an end to child marriage requires coordinated, multi-sectoral efforts that empower girls, mobilize their families and communities, change gender-inequitable social norms, and strengthen and implement laws and policies. This collaboration will help drive the extension of programs in other related to address child marriage.

Given the realities and scale of marriage markets, programs that aim to change family behavior must occur at scale. Working at scale requires confidence in the evidence underpinning program components. Economic investment schemes in India, DFID-support child marriage programs in Ethiopia, Tostan's work on human rights awareness in Senegal have yield some measureable community-level impact at a very large scale. Adapting these techniques and supporting them at scale could build the evidence that would help them translate into use in other settings.

How can we build on this consultative process to move the field forward? How can we advance the movement to end child marriage through our research? What sort of consultation would be most useful for moving this process forward? The WHO-convened meeting to take place in December 2013 is an excellent place to promote a shared approach to the research that needs to be invested in.

Build Consensus Around these Research Concepts and Priorities

- Identify specific research partners who can take some of the initial steps, e.g., asking 5-10 researchers to produce briefs that fit together, validate the framework, and provide accessible documentation on what we know with confidence at this point.
- Girls Not Brides has begun developing a theory of change for the field, and DFID has developed a partial theory of change in the context of its work on reducing early pregnancy. Before long, it will make sense to organize a research consultation to develop alignment around the concepts shared here and to test their relevance across regions, countries, and within districts and specific marriage markets. The World Health Organization and Girls Not Brides organized one such consultation in December 2013.

Share Commitments and Strategize About them

- Establish a division of labor, i.e., see where partners' work fits together geographically and conceptually
- Look for opportunities to recognize and reinforce existing research and programs and to build on that very explicitly.

Identify Advocacy Opportunities and Collaborate on Having the Greatest Impact

- Develop a more concerted advocacy strategy to drawing people working in maternal health, education, sexual and reproductive health, livelihoods and so on into the child marriage arena

Ensure Special Attention is Directed at Hotspots

- Efforts to advance global coordination should occur in partnership with other donors and national governments in specific sub-national districts – this provides national governments and local organizations increased technical and programmatic support to design and implement new programs and to better evaluate and scale existing programs.

Footnotes

First, here is the Judith- Ann Walker reference for box on pages 11- 12 where it says “note: reference Ford West Africa scan”. Walker, Judith- Ann. 2013. Mapping Early Marriage in West Africa: A Scan of Trends, Interventions, What Works, Best Practices and the Way Forward. Lagos, Nigeria: Ford Foundation.

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