Report on the Expert Group Meeting on the Evidence Base for Accelerated Action to End Child Marriage in South Asia

Bangkok, Thailand
September 26 to 28, 2016

UNFPA

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Acknowledgements

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Acronyms & Abbreviations

ADP	BRAC Adolescent Development Program
APAD	Apni Beti Apna Dhan
APRO	Asia and the Pacific Regional Office (UNFPA)
BALIKA	Bangladeshi Association for Life Skills, Income and Knowledge for Adolescents
BRAC	Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee
CBCP	Community Based Child Protection
CCT	Conditional Cash Transfer
CEFM	Child, early, and forced marriage
CHSJ	Centre for Health and Social Justice
CM	Child marriage
DFID	UK Department for International Development
DHS	Demographic & Health Survey
EGM	Expert Group Meeting
ELA	Employment and Livelihoods for Adolescents
FEM	Forum to Engage Men
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEP	Community-Based Girl's Education Project
GOI	Government of India
ICRW	International Centre for Research on Women
M&E	Monitoring & Evaluation
M&L	Monitoring and Learning
MASVAW	Men's Action for Stopping Violence Against Women
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
NFHS	National Family Health Survey (India)
NIRN	Nepal National Interreligious Network
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
PRACHAR	Promoting Change in Reproductive Behavior of Adolescents
PSA	Public Service Announcement
PSM	Propensity Score Matching
RAP	Regional Action Plan
RCT	Randomized Control Trial
ROSA	UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia
SAARC	South Asia Association for the Rights of Children
SACG	South Asia Coordinating Group on Action against Violence against Children
SAIEVAC	South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SoFEA	Social and Financial Empowerment of Adolescents
SRHR	Sexual & Reproductive Health and Rights
TFR	Total Fertility Rate
TOC	Theory of Change
UBI	Universal Basic Income
UCT	Unconditional Cash Transfer

Introduction

The Asia-Pacific Regional Office United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA APRO) and the UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia (UNICEF ROSA) hosted a three-day expert group meeting to examine the evidence around programming and policies to end child marriage in South Asia. The meeting convened representatives from the hosting organizations, UNFPA, UNICEF, and UN Women country offices in South Asia and surrounding countries, experts from academia and representatives from organizations implementing programmes in the region. Presentations touched on key drivers of child marriage and promising interventions to address the practice in South Asia, based on available evaluation and research.

The meeting was largely successful in identifying key emerging issues and findings from new research on Introduction key factors and drivers for child marriage in South Asia as well as providing a platform for discussing novel programming and evaluation methods. Child marriage is a complex problem with many intersecting root causes and drivers. These drivers include: gender inequality; unequal power relations; poverty; conflict and shocks; geographic and structural factors; lack of access to education; lack of opportunities; barriers in access to sexual and reproductive rights; and barriers in access to health.

While much of the formative research on child marriage has focused on gender inequality, there remains much to be learned on other potential factors such as poverty and conflict. Overall, the evidence base is relatively low, but it is growing, with a few on going and recently completed rigorous evaluations of programming. Successful or promising interventions were presented in areas such as creating "capacity for choice." BALIKA, a programme featuring adolescent girls' clubs in Bangladesh, which recently completed an RCT, is a prime example, and many programmes include elements of empowering girls. Programmes that also include support and mobilization of communities to support empowerment of girls, such as initiatives by Promundo and World Vision to engage men and boys and Breakthrough's work on inter-gender dialogues were highlighted. Successful or promising programmes that promote alternatives to child marriage, such as Save the Children's livelihoods programmes in India and UNICEF's home-based learning for girls in Afghanistan, were also discussed.

Research and interventions in emerging areas, such as economic drivers, shocks leading to child marriage, and child marriage in conflict were limited, but these issues are clearly of interest to participants and more research is needed to better understand them. A range of evaluation methods was presented and novel methods introduced and discussed. Presentations by CARE, FHI 360 and researchers from the University of Melbourne provided lessons on adaptive learning, evaluating collective impact of multi-stakeholder projects, and on incorporating learning into programming and evaluation.

Many questions remained on evaluation, however. Ultimately, the meeting did not have the scope to address the specifics of how to implement evaluations in programming, or come to a conclusion on how to balance the priorities of (1) building the evidence base, (2) implementing more programming, and (3) how to allocate funds between the two.

Discussion often returned to the idea of putting girls (or girls and boys) at the centre of programming on child marriage, but also the ethical responsibility that accompanies efforts to empower girls with aspirations and opportunities, negotiation skills, livelihoods skills, and education. Girl-centred programming was agreed to be the most successful intervention model. Participants also expressed concern, however, that such programming puts a significant burden on girls themselves to change

norms and practices over which they have little control, and for which they may face significant backlash from their families and communities.

Political commitment and will to end child marriage is high. The inclusion of child marriage indicators in the SDGs and 2030 Agenda ensures that a system of accountability is being put in place for efforts to end child marriage. Regional commitments from SAARC and their support of national action plans to end child marriage represent important progress, though their overall effect at improving and harmonizing legal frameworks and investments in programming is still to be determined.

This meeting could not address all emerging areas of child marriage in the region. The situation of, and effects of, child marriage on child grooms remains largely unknown and ripe for more research. Although SAARC, national action plans, and some programs are working toward universal civil registration, how effective this will be at reducing child marriage requires further study. One key need that came out of the discussion was the lack of services and support for married girls, and more work is needed in this area.

The EGM on the Evidence Base for Accelerated Action to End Child Marriage answered many questions, but also raised many more. Evidence exists to support programming that puts girls at the centre, but evaluations to determine necessary components of programs, and how best to support participants to turn new skills and knowledge into action in their families and communities, are still necessary. Sustainability, scalability, and increasingly complex partnerships require innovative implementation and evaluation methods. All of this must be considered in the local context, with an eye toward historical trajectories and an understanding of the root causes, drivers, and assumptions underpinning political commitments and programming.

Ultimately, ending child marriage is part of a vision for a more just and equal society. We must continue to build the evidence base and how better to effectively use time, resources and people to better serve the millions of children - especially girls - at risk.

Objective & Purpose of the Meeting

The Asia - Pacific Regional office of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA APRO) and the Regional Office for South Asia of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF ROSA) are committed to coordinated efforts to reduce child marriage rates in South Asia. As part of this on-going commitment, the two organizations hosted a three-day expert group meeting (EGM) from 26 to 28 September, 2016, in Bangkok, to examine the key drivers of child marriage and promising interventions to address the practice in South Asia. The meeting builds on the report, "Mapping of Child Marriage Initiatives in South Asia," undertaken by UNICEF ROSA and UNFPA APRO in 2015.

Based on presentations and discussions of promising interventions, the meeting had the following aims: (1) to test and refine a common understanding of successful strategies to end child marriage; (2) to examine and discuss lessons learned, including from less successful interventions, to identify key factors and barriers that prevent or impede effective change strategies and interventions; (3) to develop a shared understanding of methodologies and approaches for monitoring and evaluating interventions and for assessing impact; and (4) to identify key priorities for additional research on and evaluation of interventions to end child marriage.

The EGM is part of, and builds on, the Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage, which represents a collaboration between UNICEF and UNFPA to strengthen critical institutions and systems, deliver quality services, set the stage for attitudinal and norms change, and to engage a wide array of actors - governments, private sector, and especially young people, as agents of change.

This meeting brought together representatives from UNICEF and UNFPA's South Asia offices with members of partner agencies - such as UN Women and country office representatives from outside of South Asia - and experts on child marriage programming and policy. Speakers included leadership and experts from advocacy organizations and multilateral bodies, implementing organizations, think tanks, and academia.

Summary of Scheduled Panels and Associated Discussion

The annexed agenda provides details on speakers and the agenda. Resource documents are listed and links are also provided in the annex along with the background paper for the EGM. What follows is a summary of the presentations and ensuing discussion by participants. This report was prepared by a consultant, Erin K. Fletcher, Ph.D., and an editor, Richard Pierce, following the meeting.

This summary below reflects the messages given by individual presenters, and also the "journey" of three-day discussion, with reflection on evidence, research gaps, strategies, programming and political action on child marriage. It does not focus heavily on areas of disagreement, but rather presents them as outstanding questions, or emphasizes the evolution of discussion over the three days. There is also little recorded here about what does not work, primarily because programmes and policies that on the face appear not to work were further unpacked throughout the meeting for attendees to garner valuable lessons on programme and policy design.

Day 1

Introductions by UNFPA and UNICEF Regional Directors

UNFPA APRO Regional Director, Ms. Yoriko Yasukawa, and UNICEF ROSA Regional Director, Ms. Jean Gough, opened the meeting with remarks on the importance of viewing child marriage as a human rights issue that must be addressed with urgency. Solutions must be brought to scale rapidly, while recognizing that eliminating child marriage will not be a quick process and that engaging with people through discussion is important. Although interventions are in place, and although the UN has made great strides and has adopted a resolution to end the harmful practice of child marriage, there is still a long way to go. Commitment and political will to end the practice are necessary elements for success. Actors and stakeholders must understand the existing evidence around what works to end child marriage, but also how to measure progress and continue to further build the evidence base Understanding better how to effectively use time, resources, and capacities will allow development agencies and implementers to better serve the millions of children at risk and to take impact to scale quickly.

The regional directors and organizers gratefully acknowledge funding for the Global Programme to End Child marriage from the EU and the governments of Canada, the Netherlands, Italy and the UK and in particular, the Government of Canada for its overall support and funding of this particular meeting.

The agenda for Day 1 included (1) presentations on the global state of the evidence and data, with a focus on the South Asia context in particular, (2) how to create an enabling environment for change, and (3) an introduction to effective programming (a discussion that would continue throughout the meeting).

SESSION 1: The state of the evidence/state of play on ending child marriage; what we know now

Objective: To present and discuss the current state of the evidence and data on child marriage globally, and the need for a comprehensive approach

Panel 1: Global trends and perspectives

Overview of global trends and data on child marriage in the context of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs

UNFPA HQ provided an overview of statistics on child marriage globally to open the session, highlighting that child marriage is a widespread phenomenon affecting millions of women around the world. Analysis of cross-country DHS data indicates that 33% of women aged 20 to 24 were married as children. While West and Central Africa have the highest proportion of women married before 18, the number of women married as children is highest in the Asia-Pacific region; 59 million women aged 20 to 24 were married by age 18.

The inclusion of child marriage indicators in the SDGs and in the 2030 Agenda ensures that a system of accountability is being put in place to end child marriage. However, there remains an investment failure whereby adequate resources are not allocated to ending the practice. In order to make progress, this investment failure needs to be addressed, evidence for what works should be employed, and girls should be put at the centre of work to end child marriage.

UNICEF and UNFPA's Global Programme Theory of Change (TOC) guides the agenda and discussion for the EGM. The overarching framework views child marriage as a function of intersecting structural and socio-economic drivers. These include: poverty; lack of educational and economic opportunities; social expectations of behaviour, discrimination against girls/restrictive gender roles; beliefs about protection of girls; and low awareness or access to alternatives. Ultimately, the TOC is based on the assumption that girls' empowerment and engaging young people as agents of change are paramount. The Global Programme Theory of Change focuses on five main strategies:

1. Empowering girls with information, skills, and support networks.
2. Educating and mobilizing parents and community members.
3. Offering economic support and incentives for girls and their families.
4. Enhancing the accessibility and quality of formal schooling and health services for girls.
5. Fostering an enabling legal and policy framework and improving the knowledge and evidence base.

The Global Programme sets out to achieve the following impact: *"Girls fully enjoy their childhood free from the risk of marriage; they experience healthier, safer, and more empowered life transitions while in control of their own destiny, including making choices and decisions about their education, sexuality, relationship formation, marriage, and childbearing."*

The Girls, Not Brides Theory of Change on child marriage

Girls, Not Brides is a partnership of over 600 civil society organizations from more than 80 countries working toward ending child marriage. The Girls, Not Brides Theory of Change was developed for the field as a whole, with the input of over 150 members and experts. It emphasizes putting girls at the centre of efforts and pushes for multi-sectoral, multi-level, contextual interventions. It recognizes that addressing child marriage is a long-term problem that will require extensive and informed implementation, evaluation and assistance from various stakeholders including researchers, CSOs, implementers, governments, and affected populations. Additionally, child marriage does not exist in a vacuum and should be considered in the context of other development objectives. The ultimate goals are that girls can decide if, when, and whom to marry, and that girls who do marry lead healthy, empowered lives. The four strategies to achieve these goals are: empower girls; mobilize families and communities; provide services; and establish and implement laws and practices. No one strategy alone can address child marriage.

In the coming years, Girls, Not Brides members will work together to ensure that governments are held accountable to their commitment to end child marriage under SDG Target 5.3, to keep child marriage on the global and regional agendas, to continue to build understanding of what it will take to end child marriage, and to advocate for increased funding for child marriage prevention and support to married girls, particularly for grassroots organizations.

Global study on the costs of child marriage

A global study on the costs of child marriage is currently underway by researchers at the World Bank and the International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW). The first phase of the study, presented here, consisted in measuring the impact of child marriage on girls who marry early, their children, their families, communities, the economy, and society at large in a large number of countries using existing data. This phase uses existing household data for 15 to 25 countries depending on the topic of analysis.

The study relies on various types of surveys and detailed econometric techniques to estimate how five key development domains would be affected if child marriage and early childbirths were to be eradicated. These five domains are: fertility and population growth; health, nutrition and violence; educational attainment and learning; participation in the labour force and type of work; and participation, decision-making and investments. Subsequent work will focus on three in-depth country studies and consolidation of findings.

Costing models are used as well to assess the economic costs associated with the impacts of child marriage and early childbirth. The costs appear to be extremely high, suggesting that a strong economic case can be made to end child marriage, apart from the ethical reasons to do so.

The largest costs by far come from the impact of child marriage and early childbirths on fertility and thereby population growth. Substantial costs are also associated with the losses in educational attainment for girls, and thereby losses in income in adulthood. Other costs are related to the impact of child marriage and early childbirth on the children of young mothers, including through under-five malnutrition and mortality. The impacts of ending child marriage on labour force participation seem to be less salient, as are impacts on violence and agency.

Summary findings will soon be available in Wodon (2016).[1]

Discussion for Panel 1

The discussion for Panel 1 consisted of three main lines of questioning. First, participants wanted more information on the study of the costs and potential impacts of ending child marriage. Particularly, they raised concerns about the domestic violence data, and whether there can be any disaggregation between types of violence (e.g., sexual, physical). There was also confusion on the distinction between marginal and global effects on nutrition and under-5 mortality, as participants expected larger effects in this domain. Low overall birth rates among under-18 mothers mean that even large individual impacts on nutrition are not large enough to make an impact on country-level stunting or malnutrition rates. Finally, participants wanted to understand better whether and how total fertility rate (TFR) reductions beyond the replacement rate would result in economic growth when many countries are at or approaching replacement rate fertility.

A second line of questioning, which participants would return to throughout the meeting, focused on girls' empowerment and girl-centred programming, and possible unintended consequences associated with these approaches. In particular, participants noted that girl-centred programming risks putting a great deal of pressure on girls themselves to change harmful practices and norms, which could lead to backlash. Programmes should not only increase aspirations, but also capacity and opportunities, which cannot happen in the absence of community- and systems-level work. Echoing a theme that was repeated throughout the meeting, panellists identified that while focusing on empowerment of adolescent girls was key to ending the practice of child marriage, narrowly focusing on one approach will not bring about the desired outcomes and could even result in adverse outcomes.

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1 Wodon, Q., 2016, Estimating the Global Impacts of Child Marriage and Early Childbirths on Development Outcomes and the Associated Economic Costs: Data, Methods, and Key Results, Washington, DC: The World Bank and ICRW.

Finally, a number of participants raised questions about the current state of the global evidence and its relationship to programming. What kind of programmes have worked? What countries have achieved significant declines in child marriage and how have they done it? What is the lesson for programme design from global studies? There are not many evaluated programmes, and to what extent we should accept lessons from unevaluated programmes remains an open question.

Questions raised that were largely unaddressed in this discussion included questions on emerging evidence around how child marriage is linked to trafficking, how child marriage relates to other types of violence against children, and the potential role of technology in reaching and aiding child brides and grooms.

UNICEF Video on ending child marriage

Participants were invited back to the sessions with a video public service announcement (PSA) by UNICEF on ending child marriage.

(Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m7gaDc9Ip-I)

Panel 2:   Current trends and factors affecting child marriage in South Asia: An overview.

Overview of UNICEF regional data on child marriage in South Asia

Bringing the conversation more concretely to the South Asia region, UNICEF's Data, Research and Policy team compiled and presented an overview of the relevant statistics and trends on child marriage in South Asia. Underreporting of child marriage is a significant problem, as child respondents may fear legal or other consequences. Thus, the following statistics refer to prevalence rates among 20-to-24 year-olds, the first cohort past the age of child marriage, in order to alleviate underreporting.

Using various data sources, the report shows that prevalence varies significantly across South Asia: prevalence rates of child marriage among 20-to-24 year-old women range from 4% in the Maldives to 59% in Bangladesh. Large changes are also visible across time; while child marriage has declined over the past 30 years throughout the region, the fastest declines have been in the Maldives and Pakistan, though there are some questions on the veracity of the Maldives data. Also, much of the decrease in child marriage rates is driven by the decrease in under-15 child marriage among girls.

There is also significant "within-country" variation in rates of child marriage, begging the question, what is happening that allows for such large in-country differences? In India, for instance, 15% of girls are married as children in Goa, but 81% are married as children in Bihar. Child brides are more likely to be found in rural areas than in urban areas, however it is not known where they came from originally, just that they are in rural areas now that they are married.

Child brides are more likely to be in poorer families than in wealthier families, but child marriage happens in all income and faith groups. Very little is known about child grooms, from prevalence to impacts of the practice on them. Overall there are fewer child grooms than child brides; Nepal and India are in the top 10 child groom countries.

Measuring progress over the next 4 years will be difficult due to the way data are collected. Data from censuses and household surveys (which occur every 5 to 10 years), civil registration systems (with poor coverage), and monitoring and measurement of individual interventions are not sufficient to identify changes over short time periods.

In an attempt to measure (1) the number of child brides and grooms and (2) potential declines in child marriage over a short period of time, UNICEF conducted a baseline study for child marriage using a Markov model with Monte Carlo simulations. The calculations suggest that if interventions to prevent child marriage reach 8% of the population, prevalence could be reduced from 6.17% at the end of 2013 to 5.56% by the end of 2017. However, this is still not enough; if the goal is to end child marriage by 2030, how are we going to up our game?

Research on factors that drive child marriage in Asia

Plan International conducts extensive programming and research on child marriage. Norms regarding girls' sexuality and the associated shame it is presumed to bring on a family if she has sex outside of marriage, informs parents desire to marry girls off, in order to shift the burden and responsibility of protecting a girl's "honour" onto the groom's family.

There are other norms that influence the child marriage decision too. Girls are often considered "ready" for marriage once they being menstruating, while men are expected to gain wealth and status before marrying. Unmarried girls are also treated differently than boys: one participant in a focus group was quoted as saying, *"If a girl doesn't get married, people will start to gossip about her. She will lose her reputation... for a man, it is less of an issue. He can remain single."* In Pakistan, the practice of "watta satta," or exchange of brother-sister or niece-uncle pairs, may lead to early marriage.

Due to strong social and cultural norms, messaging alone does not always work and it needs to be strongly backed by comprehensive programming. The gender division of labour in the household, and systematic disempowerment of girls, reinforces the idea that girls are not able or permitted to make their own decisions. *"If a girl never expects to make a decision for herself, it eventually makes sense that force is not perceived as pressure, coercion or lack of choice..."*

To identify structural and environmental factors affecting child marriage, Plan conducted 2,742 quantitative surveys, 158 semi-structured interviews, and 47 focus group discussions. They found that increasing education and knowledge of services are associated with lower rates of child marriage, longer schooling, and later marriage, while unintended pregnancy is associated with higher rates of child marriage. "The Index of Acceptability" was also produced as a practical tool for designing programmatic interventions in related communities in accordance with the degree of resistance or acceptability factors. For more details, please visit: https://plan-international.org/getting-evidence-asia-child-marriage-initiative

Child marriage, harmful practices and gender inequalities: Challenges from India

A largely unexplored area of research on child marriage is the potential unintended consequences of a rising age of marriage. Research in India suggests that delaying age at marriage, and the associated reductions in fertility and average family size, may have exacerbated gender-based sex selection, although the causal link is still not clear. In areas of India where the age of marriage is rising, sex selection at birth is getting worse and arising where it did not exist before. To understand this phenomenon it is important to recognise that parents make decisions based upon their beliefs about the world they live in and the intergenerational transfer of wealth. Where girls sexuality is strictly controlled and the institution of marriage is "compulsory" the rising age of marriage means that parents must invest more in girl children before they marry, only to have their adult labour benefit another family (usually through household work). Thus, the incentive to invest in girls is lowered, and at the extreme, may result in gender-biased sex selection.

Understanding the historical roots of child marriage and the trajectory of its salience as a social issue is also important in deciding how to measure and, ultimately, address it. In the context of India, raising the age of consent was a controversial issue and child marriage was at the heart of social reform associated with independence movements. Then, by the 1970s, child marriage was no longer on the agenda, while anti-violence and anti-dowry conversations took centre stage.

Asking why child marriage is now on the international agenda again, how child marriage is being measured, and how the variables used to measure it are gendered are questions that should be asked when determining priorities. The concepts of "a child" and "marriage" were also questioned: how do different societies construct childhood and adolescence, and what is it that makes marriage compulsory in a society? In addition, the speaker questioned whether the focus on norms was overstated, especially if it comes at the exclusion of other drivers, like poverty.

Discussion for Panel 2

Discussion following this panel centred on the idea that child marriage is a complex problem and that attempting to address it raises more questions than answers. There are multiple drivers of child marriage and they interact distinctly in different contexts, with little evidence to suggest what is the cause and what is the effect. How are the root causes connected?

Understanding what is happening at the grassroots level and generating evidence to support various strategies is important. Interventions should start with the community, to understand social norms, traditions, and contexts in order to work with a range of actors, including those not traditionally in the ambit of programming. Additionally, the direction of causation and optimal focus of programming is unclear; is child marriage the outcome of interest? Or is education or labour force participation the dependent variable on which we should focus? And why is marriage so valued? What makes it a compulsory institution in many countries?

Answering these questions involves increasing micro-level research to better understand causality and drivers. Bringing programmes to scale may also address the larger normative and institutional factors. But each of these solutions has its own costs. Evaluation can be expensive, not only in dollars, but also time and expertise. There is still much to be learned about bringing programmes to scale, and understanding their effects requires even more evaluation. A lack of evidence may be solved by more research, but must balance that cost with those of implementation. There is no clear answer yet as to where resources are best invested.

Additionally, participants in this panel wanted to discuss research gaps, including "love marriages" and child grooms. In some cases, *adolescents themselves* may be initiating early marriage, as it may be the only way to openly express sexuality or a relationship in some cultures. How should these adolescents be included in programming and interventions and should they be seen as different to other girls who are married off by their parents? Participants indicated that there would need to be differences in programming and treatment of these adolescents, and that this requires further exploration.

Finally, participants discussed the idea of a marriage as a social contract, questioning "whose contract is it anyway?" Is a "contract" between the two parties, or is it between households or communities? If there is a larger social contract, how can we expect individuals to conform to the standards and laws of a state or community that they may not feel they belong to? There must be community dialogue on this. In particular, Afghanistan is a particularly challenging setting for this work given its heterogeneity and on-going conflict. The lack of social cohesion and other social factors should be considered in determining how to end child marriage, particularly in examining small, diverse, and often isolated communities.

Video

After returning from lunch, participants were invited to watch a video by UN Television on ending child marriage in one village in Afghanistan.

(Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zMSXY5KKz8Q)

Panel 3: Current trends and factors affecting child marriage in South Asia: Creating an enabling environment for change.

Regional commitments and initiatives to end child marriage

SAIEVAC is an Apex Body of SAARC that engages with the eight countries in South Asia, with the mandate to end violence against children. SAIEVAC primary focus is on child marriage, child labour, corporal punishment, sexual abuse and exploitation, and trafficking within the framework of 13 strategic objectives. SAIEVAC's governance structure includes CSOs, children and the SACG (representatives from UN/INGOs besides the governments. It has a Regional Action Plan (RAP) to End Child Marriage in South Asia (2015-2018), which is supported further by the Kathmandu Call to Action to End Child Marriage adopted in November 2015. The RAP among others, includes provisions for identifying gaps between international instruments and national legal frameworks, support for harmonizing national legal frameworks, commissioning of data collection and analysis on child marriage, mobilizing communities to change gender norms, creating alternative economic and social opportunities for girls, registering births and marriages.

Legal frameworks on child marriage: Country and regional analysis

The Centre for Reproductive Rights has examined the legal frameworks that reflect lack of accountability to address impunity for child marriage in South Asia. While child marriage results in a continuum of harms and violates fundamental human rights guaranteed under international treaties and national constitutions, it continues to be perceived merely as a "social evil" rather than as a criminal offense. The ineffectiveness of legal prohibitions on child marriage results from weak implementation of restrictions and from a lack of harmonization of laws, which together blatantly permit continuation of child marriage.

There is a lack of uniformity across criminal, civil, personal, and religious laws regarding the age of marriage as well as on making consent mandatory for marriage. In many countries child marriage is voidable but not actually void, which requires one of the parties to the marriage to initiate the process of voiding the marriage often in a short time frame or otherwise by meeting unreasonable criteria, which acts as a barrier to access available legal remedies against child marriage. Other crimes that occur behind the veil of child marriage, like domestic violence, sexual violence, including martial rape and child labour, are not recognized. Prosecution of cases against child marriage is uncommon, with few legal remedies to support child brides. In addition, the sexual and reproductive health consequences of child marriage remain largely ignored and the needs of married girls are not being sufficiently addressed.

More work is needed to harmonize and strengthen legislation around child marriage, including: (1) addressing gaps and inconsistencies in the existing legal frameworks, identifying and addressing the existing gaps and inconsistencies between the laws prohibiting child marriage and laws that disempower girls and women and act as barriers in accessing legal remedies; (2) ensuring accountability for the implementation of laws and policies; (3) making budgetary allocations to support implementation of laws and policies; (4) ensuring birth and marriage registration; and (5) enhancing the capacity of law enforcement officials, and of relevant stakeholders who are responsible, to effectively implement child marriage prohibition laws/policies and to ensure access to legal remedies and redress for married girls.

Creating an enabling environment for change: Realizing girls' SRHR

Lack of protection of girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) is both a cause and consequence of child marriage. These rights include reproductive rights, reproductive health, sexual health, and sexual rights, and are not secondary rights, but non-negotiable and key to a woman's autonomy. Ensuring protection of girls' access to SRHR is a "whole-environment" type of problem.

Provision of quality services and ability to access those services without fear or coercion, is often denied for cultural, religious, or normative reasons. Advocacy, research, and communications by ARROW, focus on ensuring that girls (both married and unmarried) are provided with high-quality, comprehensive sex education. A further undertaking of programmes to amplify girls' voice and agency is necessary. ARROW's advocacy and policy work focuses on universal access to SRHR, calls for improvement in the evidence base, and includes a push for more political commitment to SRHR.

Discussion for Panel 3

Discussion following the presentations focused on three main lines of enquiry. First, how to successfully engage governments and build common understanding among organizations once government commitments are in place. For instance, in Afghanistan, there has been little success in pressuring the government, despite SAARC's regional action plan, although a National Action Plan (NAP) is now in place. Coordination across government is essential. Panellists also urged agencies to coordinate among themselves in order to speak with one voice and to give clear messages to governments.

Second, there was significant discussion on how to ensure SRHR in a context of gender inequality, legally entrenched patriarchy (as evidenced by inheritance laws favouring men, or by lack of marital rape laws), and the existing dowry system. Harmonizing laws to ensure sexual and reproductive health and rights is viewed as part of the solution here.

Several questions arose around legal frameworks. How best to use incentives and disincentives set up by the state to prevent child marriage? How to harmonize laws to better serve girls, as parallel legal systems may mean that laws protecting girls are not being applied? Parallel legal systems bring along related issues: they may serve to legitimize marital rape and early pregnancy, and may require, or favour, mediation in place of prosecution to maintain social harmony. But at what cost?

One provocative question was raised in the discussion, whether with all of the challenges involved in enforcing legal frameworks, agencies and organizations should focus their efforts on timing of first pregnancy and birth spacing, rather than preventing child marriage, in order to have the greatest impact on maternal health.

SESSION 2: Effective programme interventions on child marriage: The evidence for change

Objective: To present and discuss the evidence base for interventions to end child marriage that have been robustly evaluated, as well as to present and discuss promising practices.

Panel 1:   Effective programme interventions: A global and regional perspective.

Overview of the global evidence to end child marriage

The results of two systematic reviews of evidence on child marriage were presented, one conducted by ICRW (Malhotra et al., 2011; Lee-Rife et al., 2012) and one funded by the MacArthur Foundation (Kalamar et al., 2016). The ICRW review identified 23 programmes that had been rigorously evaluated, most using some sort of quasi-experimental design, and the MacArthur Foundation review identified 11 such programmes.

The reviews jointly identified five strategies for existing programmes on preventing child marriage: (1) empowering girls with information, skills and networks; (2) enhancing quality and accessibility of formal education; (3) economic support and incentives; (4) educating and mobilizing parents and community members; and (5) fostering an enabling legal and policy framework. Importantly,

these strategies inform the strategies outlined in the Global Programme Theory of Change. The most promising of these strategies appear to be: empowering girls with information, skills and social networks; and providing economic incentives, especially for education.

Three programme approaches were also summarized. The horizontal programme approach, in which a programme employs multiple levers of change, appears more successful in achieving sustained impact, although complexity can make implementation and evaluation difficult and costly. The vertical programme approach focuses on structural drivers, such as education access and poverty, however lack of community engagement and norm change focus may undermine sustainability. Finally, the activist programme approach, in which national advocacy and legislative efforts are the key area of focus, appears to be less effective, but is also less evaluated, and possibly (and perhaps not coincidentally) the least-well-funded.

The recommendations from the reviews include (1) balancing programme depth with scale and sustainability; (2) maximizing lessons from vertical and horizontal approaches; (3) using different levers of change to innovate faster; and (4) increasing investment in evaluation.

Presentation of background paper for the expert group meeting: Approaches and interventions to end child marriage in South Asia

The background paper for this EGM (please see Annex III) follows the agenda by taking first a global view and then a regional view of the current state of research, data, and evidence on child marriage. It provides an overview of key drivers of child marriage, including poverty, conflict and shocks, social norms, structural and environmental factors, gender inequality and unequal power relations, lack of voice and agency, and legal frameworks. It highlights effective and promising interventions from the South Asia region matching the Global Programme TOC strategies, and summarizes the mapping initiative undertaken by UNFPA APRO and UNICEF ROSA in 2015.

The paper provides a short discussion of evaluation methodologies, highlighting that randomized control trials (RCTs) are widely considered the "gold standard" of evidence, but alternative methods, including impact evaluation methods like natural and quasi-experiments, as well as newer methods such as outcome mapping and rapid learning, are in place, although there is still no consensus on how they are seen when it comes to generating evidence on what works. Finally, the background paper set out a list of key questions for reflection and discussion for the EGM.

Discussion for Panel 1

Approaches and challenges to measurement and evaluation dominated the discussion. Participants noted the lack of interventions that try to change the discourse around child marriage beyond simply delaying marriage until age 18, as well as the general lack of understanding on the longer-term historical trends around child marriage. Which countries have eradicated child marriage and how have they done so remains an open question.

Concerns were raised about the ethics of evaluation, in particular that evaluation should not involve withholding a programme that is known to work from a control group, simply in order to ensure rigorous evaluation. Rather, RCTs should be designed carefully, with resource allocation and budgets in mind, for example that they be put in place where programme rollout is scheduled or where funds are limited. In response, the idea was proposed that all forms of evaluation should be held to a common set of ethical standards. Participants expressed a desire to understand new and innovative types of evaluation, particularly in light of the significant cost and technical expertise needed to undertake impact evaluations. Finally, there were questions about how to measure social norms and norms change. Panellists noted on-going studies in Pakistan (the Improving Adolescent Lives in South Asia RCT) and the US (Paluck & Shepherd 2016).

Conclusion of Day 1 and Wrap-Up

A number of key themes emerged during the first day. First, it was apparent that programmes need to work in a multi-sectoral way, but programme design is often still caught in "siloed" and vertical ways of thinking and acting. Child marriage is very local and granulated in the way that we understand it; there are many drivers and factors influencing the decision, as well as larger trends. The idea of understanding better what is "evidence" and what are the key research questions going forward to better understand how to combat child marriage was key. The direction of causality is not always clear (e.g., does increasing education lead to less child marriage? Or does eliminating child marriage lead to more education?), and interventions can result in adverse situations, such as backlash or stigmatizing girls who are already married. These unintended consequences are not well understood or identified.

Collecting evidence is not a simple endeavour, either. We are dealing with much more complex theories of change than we were five years ago, and this shows that evidence is feeding into programming. But the more complex our theories of change, the harder it gets to measure which elements are having an impact.

Many gaps in the larger state of the evidence and discussion were identified as well. The prominent areas of interest were measurement and evaluation, further research on the relationship between child marriage and conflict/disaster, grooms, civil registration, and how to measure social norms.

Finally, interventions need to reach more people more efficiently, through effective scale-up, while understanding that interventions should be nuanced and localised.

Day 2

Panel 2:   Selected country initiatives.

Impact of conditional cash transfers (CCTs) on age at marriage - India

Apni Beti Apna Dhan, the oldest and first conditional cash transfer scheme targeting girls in order to address adverse sex selection, and with the specific design to delay age at marriage in India, took place in Haryana state (Sinha and Yoong 2009). Poor and disadvantaged families were enrolled and given a bond of 2,500 rupees that would mature to 25,000 rupees upon a girl's 18th birthday.

To evaluate the programme, beneficiaries and "matched" non-beneficiaries from similar social and economic circumstances were selected and asked to complete surveys just before and after turning 18. Among both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, the vast majority of survey respondents were not married by age 18. Although marriage rates were slightly lower among beneficiaries (13% vs. 17%), this difference was not statistically significant.

The programme seemed to have no effect on marriage rates below age 18. As an unintended consequence the benefit might have changed timing of marriage after 18; programme participants were more likely to marry between ages 18 and 19 than non-beneficiaries. Girls' aspirations and completion of 8th grade were higher than among non-beneficiaries, but there appeared to be no effects on gender-equitable attitudes or norms, and no effect on secondary education beyond 8th grade. Beneficiaries' parents may have seen the payments as "for marriage," thus making marginal delays to the age of marriage, but declines in the rate of child marriage were largely due to a broader secular shift in Haryana state over time. Conditional cash transfers cannot change norms alone, and indeed may lead to unintended consequences when benefits are not clearly defined for non-marriage activities such as education or entrepreneurship; framing is important.

The Bangladeshi Association for Life Skills, Income and Knowledge for Adolescents (BALIKA) - Bangladesh

Bangladesh has one of the highest rates of child marriage in South Asia: 59% of girls are married before the age of 18 (Gregson et al., 2016). Although rates have been on the decline, child marriage persists due to poverty (Bajracharya & Amin, 2012, Erulkar, 2006), practice of dowry (Suran, Amin, Huq & Chowdhuri, 2004, Amin et al., 2014), sexual violence and insecurity (Massey, 2009, Deen, 2010, Plan International, 2011), the presence of a large migrant community (Amin, Rahman & Hossain, 2012), and as part of a response to climate change (Alston et al. 2014).

BALIKA was designed in a context of little existing rigorous evidence for Bangladesh, and relies on evidence from other countries, namely that giving women opportunities for jobs can delay child marriage (Jensen 2012), and that incentives, tutoring support and community conversations reduced child marriage in Ethiopia (Erulkar and Muthengi 2009). The evaluation method was discussed in a later session, so here we concentrate on the intervention itself.

BALIKA was designed as a "whole girl" intervention with educational support (including tutoring), livelihoods skills training, and gender awareness skills training programmes. It includes centres that offer basic life skills training, community mobilization including awareness-raising and sessions for parents, use of technology, and a focus on sustainability. The programme was shown to reduce child marriage, to increase education, and to improve wellbeing and health. Population Council is working to transition its girls' centres so they operate independently. About half of the centres have agreed to continue sessions on a trial basis, and they are seeking funding from the government and other sources to keep them up and running.

Interventions using conditional cash transfers to prevent child marriage - India

India has been the site of many cash transfer schemes. An assessment of the Central Government CCT scheme, *Dhanlakshmi*, was also presented in this session. Launched in 2008, Dhanalakshmi provided cash grants to all families with daughters in seven Indian states. Parents received a series of small grants at the birth of the child, for immunizations, for enrolment and attendance in primary and secondary school each year, and a larger lump sum payment upon a girl's 18th birthday if she remained unmarried.

For the assessment, a two-stage process was employed: a desk review and assessment of 15 CCTs in the first stage, followed by an in-depth assessment of the *Dhanalakshmi* scheme from the beneficiary perspective. For the assessment of the scheme, a survey of beneficiary and non-beneficiary households was conducted to assess perceptions regarding the usefulness of the scheme and the extent to which the scheme influenced parental attitudes toward daughters.

The findings of the survey indicated positive influence of the scheme on parental decisions related to two major aspects: education and marriage of girls. This seemed to have had some impact in reducing gender-based discrimination in the early stages of girls' lives. Parents welcomed the support provided by the scheme in educating their daughters and expressed a willingness to delay their marriage until age 18. However, a large number of parents also stated that they would use the final lump sum payment for marriage expenses as opposed to education of their daughters. The study also applied propensity score matching (PSM) to compare the impact of financial incentives between beneficiary and non-beneficiary households. PSM analysis confirmed the positive role of the scheme in bringing about at least a change in attitudes of parents toward daughters. The analysis revealed that parents in beneficiary households showed more equitable gender attitudes and were also more likely to support a girl's right to choose her partner and when to marry.

The study did not conclusively state that CCTs motivate parents to have daughters, but it did indicate that such schemes play an important enabling role in the early years of a girl's life by positively influencing the attitudes of parents. At the same time, it also underscored that CCTs by themselves are not sufficient to significantly shift discriminatory attitudes toward girls. The study recommended: (1) restructuring of incentives - delinking schemes from marriage, removing conditions related to family planning, removing differential incentives for different birth orders of girls; (2) simplification of conditions to improve access to and reduction of transaction costs through larger amounts spread across lesser number of disbursements; and (3) improved targeting of incentives to focus more on higher education for girls and to include options for different economic groups.

Discussion for Panel 2

Discussion for this section focused on details of the cash transfer schemes and future plans for evaluation of long-term effects, sustainability, and an unresolved question of the effects of cash transfers on the rise of bride price in certain areas. The effects of unconditional cash transfers are not well understood, and the benefits to a basic income or unconditional cash transfer versus one where people are paid for a service were discussed. How to sustain these costly programmes, particularly when they should ideally be undertaken in conjunction with other interventions, was also a concern.

SESSION 3: Other initiatives that have an impact on child marriage - What can we learn?

Objective: To discuss the contribution and impact of programmes promoting life skills, education, girls' empowerment, and other initiatives to reduce child marriage.

This panel session was introduced with a series of questions to stimulate discussion about girls' empowerment. What is meant by empowerment? What are we doing to address backlash? How can

we focus interventions on girls without inadvertently giving them the responsibility for claiming their own rights, which should not be their responsibility?

Panel 1: Selected regional and country initiatives targeting adolescent girls.

The BRAC Adolescent Development Programme (ADP) and Employment and Livelihood for Adolescents (ELA)

A BRAC representative discussed the programmes aimed at adolescents in two countries, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. Programmes in both countries face challenges of sustainability, funding, and sufficient monitoring and follow-up.

The BRAC Adolescent Development Programme (ADP) has a total of 9,000 adolescent clubs with 273,367 club members. Interventions include safe space for adolescents, education on life skills through peer networks, providing livelihoods training, and a mechanism of communication, awareness and advocacy that encourages interaction and dialogue among adolescents, their parents and community leaders. It creates a supportive communication network to combat child marriage in the community. Initiatives like adolescent fairs, cultural competitions, and sports for development contribute to addressing the issues and to creating an enabling environment for developing the potential of girls. ADP provided life-skill-based education to more than 1 million adolescents and facilitated the process of developing 60 girls' football teams, with 1,080 players. It also created more than 1,000 child protection committees (CBPC) for reducing child marriage at the community level.

The experience of ADP showed that (1) coordinated efforts can help to reduce child marriage, (2) girls can achieve and contribute in their locality through leadership skills (nurtured by the interventions and engagement of community people), and (3) parents can help to reduce child marriage. Financial literacy training has served to amplify adolescent girls' general awareness and understanding of basic financial issues (Anindita Bhattacharjee, Endline Evaluation of SoFEA (Social and Financial Empowerment of Adolescents), 2013). Club members have been observed to experience significant improvement in their physical mobility as well as a better attitude toward life and gender roles. Significant improvement was also found in their parents' attitudes toward gender roles and the issue of marriage (Anindita Bhattacharjee, Endline Evaluation of SoFEA, 2013). Individual and group social communication can break the culture of silence and decrease intergenerational gaps. Research findings also show that young people consider child marriage as a social crime (icddr, b, 2014)

Afghanistan is one of the few remaining countries in South Asia where the age of marriage is 16 for girls, and a girl of 15 may marry with parental or court consent (WHO 2016). Forty-six % of women aged 20 to 24 are married before the age of 18 in Afghanistan and 15% are married before age 15. BRAC began its education programme in Afghanistan in 2002, aiming to eradicate barriers like girls safety and security, violence, and conventional mindsets regarding girls' mobility that prevent children, particularly girls, from receiving education. As of August 2015, more than 37,661 children (78% of them girls) graduated from 1,227 BRAC schools. Currently there are over 37,110 students in 1,227 BRAC schools.

Save the Children initiatives supporting adolescent girls to thrive - South Asia

Save the Children's work in South Asia takes a "protection" lens to addressing violence against children, using a broader systems approach. In supporting adolescent girls to thrive, Save the Children focuses on broader gender and cultural norms that influence the practice. Namely, child marriage is steeped in social norms and gender roles, where girl children are a "burden" or "owned" and the family's reputation is kept intact by marrying the child off. In situations where a girl is raped, marrying her to the perpetrator "solves" the rape problem. Other issues, closely related to the issue of child marriage, are those of child trafficking and child labour, with children being forced into "false marriages" for the purposes of sexual exploitation and domestic enslavement.

As an example of their work to strengthen systems, Save the Children in India is strengthening the Government of India's (GOI) child protection system in the area of training and accreditation of protection staff at the district level. To address and prevent child trafficking, Save the Children is working to raise awareness related to children being sent from rural to the urban areas, for domestic work, linking them with informal education/activity centres and I still don't follow this. Rescued children are reunited usually with parents/family not objects. If we want schools then I would either take this whole phrase out (as how is this different from enrolling them in schools), or rephrase as '...education/activity centres and enrolling them in schools, ideally the school they previously attended, where possible or in alternative ...' enrolling them in schools where possible or in alternative forms of vocational training or work. As part of the work to empower girls (and boys), livelihoods and skills trainings are conducted, resulting in employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for girls through opening their own beauty parlours and training to be security officers (adolescents can be offered employment after age 18).

STC has worked to intervene with runaway and trafficked children in railway stations, and again resettle both girls and boys back with their families. Experience of children's groups, particularly in Rajasthan, now shows strong positive effects and should be considered a promising practice. The experience of girls participating in such groups stands out. Girls are the leaders in these groups and have gained confidence through participating in the groups, and communities have started to listen to them. While empowerment and livelihoods trainings seem to have positive effects for some, other indicators suggest that some programmes have put too much pressure on girls to change social norms or community expectations of behaviour, and thus did not have as strong an effect as predicted. To respond at the family and community level, to the challenges of early and forced marriage, empowering women and girls, addressing social (and particularly gender) norms, parenting programmes, working with men and boys, developing programmes that integrate child protection with livelihoods and building strong protection systems that protect both girls and boys from all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation are yet to show direct effects on child marriage, but are good and promising practices.

Pathfinder International India - Learning from the PRACHAR project, India

Pathfinder's Promoting Change in Reproductive Behavior of Adolescents project (PRACHAR) took place in Bihar, India from 2001 to2012. PRACHAR's primary aims were to promote healthy timing and spacing of pregnancy; to delay first birth until the age of 21; to delay marriage; and to increase use of contraceptives using a community behavioural intervention based on a life-cycle approach. At the beginning of the project, 15.7 years was the mean age of marriage in Bihar, with the age at first cohabitation being 17.2 years.[2]

PRACHAR's methods consisted of a three-day life-skills education programme for all unmarried adolescents (with boys and girls in separate groups) on sex education, contraception, abortion, HIV/AIDS/STIs, and life skills including decision-making and negotiation skills to use with their partners and parents. The programme was evaluated in its most intensive phase and then elements were transitioned to a government-led model involving community-based health workers, where the programme was continued, but in a less intensive manner. In evaluating the most intensive phase of the project, women in intervention areas were 44% less likely to get married (median age at marriage for girls increased by 2.6 years), adjusting for education and caste. Also, adolescents in the programme were more likely to discuss their desired age of marriage with their parents. In evaluation of the less intensive phase, when programme elements were handed over to the government, there were no effects on age of marriage, but knowledge and favourable attitudes had still increased in intervention areas. These results were attributed to the short duration of implementation.

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2   The difference in age at first marriage and age at cohabitation is common in parts of India where children are married but do not go to live with their spouse until they are older.

Secondary data analysis from PRACHAR's evaluations have identified a minimum set of interventions that need to be integrated into future programmes. This includes life skills education among unmarried adolescents and interaction with key family stakeholders, with the overall communication strategy focused on interpersonal communications and small group meetings. The above minimum package is likely to be delivered for less than $15 per beneficiary. Among the challenges, transitioning responsibility to government often demands dilution of the model, while still expanding reach. And it is still difficult to reach adolescent boys and ensure provision of clinical services to unmarried adolescent girls.

Based on learning from PRACHAR, Pathfinder International has now re-strategized its new programme to focus only on vulnerable/socially marginalized populations, which is expected to accelerate efforts toward ending early marriages.

Discussion for Panel 1

The issues of sustainability and how to involve government partners - or transition programmes to government control after piloting in order to scale up - were discussed at length. Including government partners at every stage, not just when a programme is ready to be handed over, is more likely to result in successful operation of a programme after an organization leaves. The question of evidence, including how learning was being brought back into programme design and evolution, and how to measure, was agreed to be important, but difficult to define. Similar problems with measuring outcomes such as empowerment were also discussed.

In the contexts where programming is in place, girls traditionally are excluded from decision-making about their own lives. Existing programmes are teaching them to make decisions, but are also making space for them to make those decisions through work with parents and communities. These programmes rely on the strength of the group. That is, the path to empowering young girls must be accompanied by programmes that bring parents along and must ensure that there are integrated services available. However, there remain significant challenges in measuring progress due to (1) difficulties measuring different variables and (2) a dearth of evaluated programmes.

Video on ending child marriage

Before the group reconvened for the afternoon, a video showing religious leaders promoting positive injunctive and descriptive norms about child marriage was shown.

(Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KNVKzU_h94c)

SESSION 4: Changing the norms that support child marriage: Mobilizing communities for change

Objective: To discuss initiatives designed to mobilize communities for change to end child marriage

Panel 1: Working with faith-based organizations to end child marriage.

Working with faith-based organizations in India

World Vision International implements a programme model called Channels of Hope, for child protection in India. It aims to help faith communities address violence against children including child marriage, abuse, neglect, exploitation. The model relies on guiding principles from participants' holy scripture; life transformation; improving the heart and mind, and motivating response to significant issues, not just child marriage. Importantly, the programme states that it does not aim to change

doctrine, but asks faith leaders to update community (and sometimes their own) beliefs about social issues from a faith-based perspective. Staff and faith leader training and development are an important part of the organization's programming. Faith-based leaders are included at every stage of programme design, including monitoring and evaluation. Elements of World Vision's programming in India include addressing child marriage through "girl power" groups, advocating for change in the legal environment, teaching girls about rights and how to negotiate with others, as well as working with faith leaders.

Working with faith-based organizations to end child marriage in Nepal

In Nepal, the National Interreligious Network (NIRN) works to end child marriage by engaging leaders of all faiths. Their view is that there is religious harmony at the country level, but at the grassroots level, religious leaders misinterpret religious texts to uphold conservative views and unequal power relations. Combined with the respect given to religious leaders and their consultative or celebratory role in significant life events, they have a strong role to play in ending child marriage.

NIRN's programming includes training of 263 local religious leaders in six districts in Nepal, with an additional 200 leaders in five districts to be trained in the coming year. They have written a manual highlighting relevant teachings from holy scriptures that support ending child marriage with the support of UNFPA and UNICEF.

No rigorous evaluation is in place, although the network has worked to stop 15 marriages from happening. The network has created a common platform for divergent faith leaders to discuss possible ways to end child marriage in a way that is based on their respective holy writings. Leaders working with NIRN have been receptive to the messaging and working with their congregations and religious communities to reduce harmful traditional practices, and this appears to have had a positive impact. Still, the organization faces challenges in identifying child marriage, encouraging discussion of the practice among communities who fear speaking about it, and in identifying and combating misinterpretations of scripture.

Discussion for Panel 1

Discussion in this session focused on three main topics, (1) what was the evidence generated from these programmes, how was it generated or how will it be generated going forward, (2) how agencies and actors should think about engaging religious leaders in the context of working toward gender equality, and (3) distinctions in the levels of leadership within religions, for example, from the Islamic Council in Pakistan to the grassroots level, how should engagement differ when working with different levels of leadership? A reframing of how to best engage religious leaders was also proposed. One participant suggested training religious leaders as advocates for their communities to hold the State accountable to their various commitments on funding and resources for ending child marriage, rather than just seeing religious leaders as gatekeepers to reach their followers.

The discussion was somewhat heated in nature, but participants acknowledged it was a debate that needed more time and attention given the importance of religious leaders within countries and communities. Programmes must work with a range of actors and leverage existing resources to effect change in social norms and harmful traditional practices.

Video

Participants were shown a video with testimonials by men and boys demonstrating positive deviance in which the men and boys promote more equal gender norms by demanding access to education for girls, and refusing to marry off girl children.

(Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zdv8L47Dwd8)

Panel 2: Working with men and boys to change social norms that support child marriage

Engaging men and boys to end the practice of child marriage - a global perspective

Globally, there is very limited evidence on the effectiveness of programmes that work with men and boys to end child marriage. This is partly because there are very few programmes that work directly with men and boys, and even less have been rigorously evaluated. In 2015, Promundo, whose representative gave this presentation, authored a review of the existing evidence on the topic in collaboration with GreeneWorks.[3] One of the most pressing challenges identified is to devise better measures of change, beyond changes in attitudes and marriage rates. One particular challenge is the long-term nature of desired programming outcomes: when marriage takes place 10 to 15 years after an intervention, how do we measure success?

Emerging strategies for working with men and boys include norms change via gender transformative group education; via community mobilization, encouraging male traditional/religious leaders to speak out, supporting young men as activists; and via evidence-based advocacy for legal and policy change. Legal change includes specific policies but also multi-sectoral policies in a broad range of areas that touch on the drivers of child marriage, including, but not limited to, health, SRHR, and education.

Strategies of working directly with men and boys should ideally start from an early age and should include comprehensive sexuality education, and aspects of voice, agency and consent. At the same time, they should try not to impose the burden of change on beneficiaries and to recognize the importance of structural drivers, such as young men's unemployment resulting in parents preferring older grooms who are perceived as better able to provide economically. Work with men and boys should be complementary to work with girls rather than in opposition to it, recognizing that gender equality is beneficial to men and boys as well as to women and girls.

Engaging fathers to end child marriage

World Vision and Promundo have developed the manual, _A More Equal Future_, to engage fathers in the prevention of child marriage in India. This tool was developed as a response to social norms that support the practice of child marriage in communities where World Vision works. Working in small groups, men, their daughters, and their partners reflect on the cultural and gender norms that serve as obstacles to men's participation as involved fathers and perpetuate the devaluation of girls. To date, over 730 men have joined 55 MenCare groups across India. Qualitative evaluation has shown positive impact on household decision-making and childcare, reduction in substance abuse, positive health outcomes, as well as community-level activism.

Breakthrough - Nation Against Early Marriage/national media campaigns to end child marriage - India/Bangladesh

Engaging fathers and recognizing their role in child marriage is key to preventing the practice. Formative research shows that "eve teasing" is a primary reason not to delay marriage and fathers' incentives are aligned to encourage early marriage. Fathers are seen as having a responsibility to protect their daughters, and given that their daughter's labours will eventually benefit someone else, they have an incentive to pass on that responsibility to the groom's family as soon as possible. In addition, a father gains status in the community if he gets a good husband for his daughter. When daughters do not marry early, fathers may bear some of the backlash.

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3 http://promundoglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Engaging-Men-and-Boys-to-End-the-Practice-of-Child-Marriage1.pdf

Breakthrough has created a national media campaign in India to raise awareness about the consequences of child marriage, promote positive gender norms, and enhance the capacity of youth and communities to advocate for themselves. The mass media campaign uses Bollywood actors and young, relatable cartoon characters[4] in television, radio, community radio, and community mobilization programmes to address child marriage, with the immediate goal of educating fathers and the longer-term goal of facilitating community support for fathers who allow girls not to marry and continue their education. Breakthrough employs a multi-stakeholder approach, working with NGOs, community-health workers, parents and teachers, and even boys, to promote inter-gender dialogue. The programme has not been evaluated formally.

Engaging men and boys to change gender norms and promote gender equality - South Asia (Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka)

MenEngage's work in South Asia includes resource centres and men's groups like the Centre for Health and Social Justice (CHSJ), Men's Action for Stopping Violence Against Women (MASVAW), and the Forum to Engage Men (FEM), all focused on engaging men to end silence around GBV, to work toward gender equality, and to promote more just and peaceful societies. Evaluation is undertaken via rigorous, on-going documentation of stories of resistance, challenge, and change provided by members of the networks. Stories include instances of men starting to take more responsibility at home, men seeking reproductive health services, men taking action to stop domestic violence, and developing a wider political consciousness.

Overall there are very positive signs emerging that men and boys who have become sensitized and are reaching a consensus in their groups on how they can be part of the solution, are continuing to reflect on their power and privilege and moving toward a vision for life based on equality. They are taking action against injustice in their own families as well as in their community. Evidence shows that the practice of equality is also benefitting men and boys, not just women and girls. The changes, however, are also coming at a cost that the men have to bear, such as resistance and tension within families and rejection from peers. These unintended or less positive consequences include parental insecurity, feelings of rejection and jealousy, fathers asking sons to leave the training or leave the village, fear of losing control and privilege, and participants being thrown out of joint families.

Discussion for Panel 2

There is little rigorous evidence on using positive masculinities to address child marriage specifically, or on ending GBV more generally. One on-going RCT in Pakistan tries to test how better to engage men in ending child marriage and reducing gender-based violence. Concerns addressed during this discussion included how messages are being interpreted and understood and how programmes can ensure they are not reinforcing the protectionism inherent in the sense of honour or obligation that contributes to child marriage. Work with men and boys ultimately cannot be just about men and boys; we need to think about community-level engagement, social norms change, and the "inter-sectionalities" that reinforce gender inequality.

SESSION 5: Measuring child marriage interventions: Experiences from the region and learning from other sectors

Objective: To discuss and reflect on different approaches to evaluating impact of child marriage interventions based on experience in the region, as well as global experiences in measuring and evaluating complex, multi-stakeholder interventions that are similar in scope to the global programme on child marriage.

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4   Shilpi's Story. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u8Sh4fQ0waY

Panel 1: Experience from the region – measuring change and impact

Advance Presentation: Impact evaluation of UNICEF programme: Improving Adolescents' Lives in South Asia (Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan), funded by the Ikea Foundation

One on-going impact evaluation in Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan is attempting to tease out causal pathways of various types of interventions implemented to reduce child marriage and adolescent pregnancies, and to increase schooling and educational attainment. The University of Mannheim conducts the impact evaluations for India and Pakistan, while the Johns Hopkins University is in charge of estimating the programme's causal effects in Afghanistan. The University of Mannheim employs randomized control trials (RCTs). It randomized the treatment, and the intensity of the treatment, among different groups in order to better understand three main ideas: (1) the optimal targeting of programmes to accelerate change; (2) whether there is a "minimum" package of services that achieves the desired impact; and (3) which additional activities make the minimum package's effects stronger.

The programme design is based on a common regional architecture, adapted at country level, and consisting of three pillars. The first pillar focuses on adolescents as agents of change, which is achieved through youth groups providing programming on life skills, education, and rights. The second pillar is mobilizing communities through intergenerational dialogues. The third is service provision including knowledge and awareness-raising on existing legislation, expanding education opportunities for adolescents - especially in areas where there is no access - and linking existing services to SRHR.

Day 3

Video

Participants were shown a UNICEF PSA featuring Liam Neeson on how violence against children is not always apparent, but it is real and help is needed to make it disappear.

(Available at: https://youtu.be/VkGf2xZEprU)

Randomized controlled trials (RCTs) - Bangladesh

RCTs are a specific type of evaluation process that should be carefully considered amid a range of options for evaluation. As part of a larger process of doing formative research via extensive quantitative and qualitative baseline data on programme activities, electronically captured monitoring data, midline and endline data collection on desired outcomes, an RCT can provide rigorous, causal evidence on what works for child marriage. The inclusion of "comparison communities" is intentional, and allows researchers and implementers to understand whether there are village-wide effects, and whether these shifts can be attributed to programming, especially when there may have occurred wider, secular change. Without a comparison group, programmes may overstate or understate their effects due to changes that would have happened anyway, but which cannot be measured.

In addition to the RCT, Population Council developed unique electronic monitoring tools using SurveyCTO,[5] including activity monitoring forms, session monitoring forms, and attendance dashboards to better track and identify dropouts and causes. Additional monitoring information was included so that facilitators could better follow up, sometimes visiting girls at their homes and mobilizing the local community, as well as through monthly coordination meetings to better understand the data. At the end of the project, analysis of completed monitoring forms was able to highlight differences in delivery, to help evaluators better understand the "dose" that was delivered, and more.

Monitoring adolescent empowerment and child marriage interventions: UNICEF India's Monitoring and Learning (M&L) framework

UNICEF India's Adolescent Empowerment and Ending Child Marriage programme is derived from the Asset Framework, which identifies three pillars for change. The first is the adolescents themselves, with knowledge and skills to transform lives for themselves as well as others; second, parents and community members support adolescents with the required knowledge, skills and information to facilitate the change; third, service providers, who will ensure that the adolescents have the access to the necessary information and services to manage their lives better. The programme interventions will broadly focus on mobilizing communities, parents and service providers, changing social norms and empowering adolescents. The monitoring framework is rather intensive, as it strives to obtain a 360-degree view of the intervention through the eyes of all stakeholders, including adolescents themselves. In addition, it seeks to understand whether existing programming contributes to breaking through existing bottlenecks and barriers, such as lack of enforcement of existing laws, lack of access to secondary school for girls, adverse social norms and access to programmes.

The existing intervention is carried out in 16 districts of 8 Indian states. All indicators are measured at least annually using a set of relatively simple but powerful monitoring tools, such as household surveys, qualitative assessments, programme implementation monitoring data, and administrative data, to give a comprehensive picture of how programmes are working. Another element of the framework is to analyse the interactions between the different indicators to derive lessons learned.

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5 SurveyCTO is a mobile-based application software for creating and deploying customized surveys. This and similar applications are being used in place of paper surveys and monitoring in numerous context to reduce reporting errors and improve data analysis and visualization.

A key aspect of India's Monitoring Evaluation and Learning framework is the implementation of a continuous, institutionalized learning process where adolescents and other stakeholders on all levels meet at least every six months to analyse and discuss current monitoring data and suggest course correction. This will help to identify programme implementation strengths and weaknesses as well as to adapt accordingly.

Tipping Point: An illustration of applying developmental and feminist monitoring, evaluation and learning approaches to child marriage programming in Nepal and Bangladesh

"Tipping Point" is a three-year project in Bangladesh and Nepal focused on learning, on trying things and innovating and seeing what works, and then feeding back into programming based on that learning. Goals are to deepen understanding of gender and rights, to promote solidarity in peer groups, and to create spaces for intergenerational dialogue.

CARE's evaluation process includes a number of novel factors based in an alternative view of how to measure progress and success, which are discussed here. CARE considers its monitoring and evaluation approach to be developmental, that is, that it prioritizes learning and facilitates innovation in order to provide real time feedback rather than waiting to change course. The monitoring and evaluation approach includes community and participatory tools at all levels of the monitoring and evaluation in order to use the information for adaptive learning and programme design. Monitoring tools include outcome mapping and monitoring staff reflection around gender values and changes. Ultimately, a primary goal is to strengthen evaluative and monitoring capacity of local staff themselves, and to foster deeper staff understanding of how data and documentation are important to programming.

Because of the focus on learning, they are not measuring delays in marriage at this stage, but thinking about how to shift gender norms, and measuring incremental changes in behaviours - including girls' visibility in the community. The evaluation framework is currently being developed although early analysis suggests that the outcome monitoring process is more labour- and time-intensive, but can strengthen capacity for adaptive planning and evaluative thinking in staff - beyond M&E specialists.

Discussion for Panel 1

Discussion for this panel focused on how to make alternative methods of evaluation accessible and useful, particularly given donor frameworks with indicators for success. Additionally, the complexity of the alternative tools discussed prompted questions regarding the difficulty of handing over projects with alternative M&E frameworks to governments, who may not have the funds or capacity to continue full programmes and might need simpler tools.

The issue of learning from failures was also salient. Agencies and organizations cannot go to donors and say that a programme "failed spectacularly," but an evaluation should be able to indicate that one approach is better than the other. If no distinct recommendation can be made, at least it can be shown that in monitoring the process, implementers have learned about their own biases and how better to serve the beneficiaries. Dealing with bureaucracies is always difficult, and putting in place systematized processes that are iterative and feedback on each other (and involve staff at all levels) can make it easier. The use of alternative monitoring and evaluation frameworks is also important to communicate to donors, both the "why" and the "how," of interventions to ensure their support and buy-in.

The recurring question of "why and how are we examining norms?" and "how they are important?' was also raised. Some participants wondered why there was a continued focus on norms and their effect on child marriage to the exclusion of other drivers, including poverty and patriarchy. Finally, an ethical concern was raised with respect to monitoring and the potential for it to equate to surveillance of the poor.

Video

Participants were shown a video on "systems thinking," showing the unintended consequences of a WHO intervention in Borneo to eliminate Malaria using DDT.

(Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=17BP9n6g1F0)

Panel 2: Experience from other sectors & regions: Measuring and evaluating the impact of complex interventions

Evaluating collective impact

Traditional evaluation has struggled with measuring and effectively evaluating interventions to address so-called "wicked problems," complex problems, with multiple perspectives on the solutions, taking place in dynamic and rapidly changing social, economic, political and cultural environments. "Collective impact," an emerging approach to intervening in these complex contexts, involves engaging multiple stakeholders, developing multiple pathways to achieve aims, a long-term change process and development of shared measurement systems. Evaluation of collective impact initiatives tends to strongly incorporate a developmental evaluation approach (Patton 2011) and focus on the progress of the collective impact initiative, system-level changes as a result of the initiative, and ultimately the outcomes/impact (Parkhurst and Preskill 2014). Evaluation in this approach is designed to enable, rather than limit, strategic learning. Evaluators work collaboratively with initiative developers in an on-going process of adaption and development. Evaluation designs are flexible to allow for multiple designs for multiple users within the overall initiative. Ultimately, collective impact evaluation can incorporate attention to attribution through causal pathways, but also has a particular focus on the contribution various activities make to the overall impact of the initiative.

Measuring change in adolescent girls' lives

How to change discriminatory norms is seen as important for ending child marriage. The current dominant sources of definition and research on how norms are understood (and can change) come from social psychology and game theory. There are two distinct types of norms: (1) descriptive norms - beliefs about what is *normal practice* in the community; and (2) injunctive norms - beliefs about what people *should* do. Descriptive norms correspond to gender roles, and they tend to change first; injunctive norms correspond to gender ideologies and take longer to shift. Yet the way that norms change is messy, complex, and non-linear, and when norms change, they can invoke resistance and backlash. The goal is to track the practice of child marriage in a way that is informative about norms change but that does not induce underreporting, and does not harm girls and their families.

The Overseas Development Institute (ODI) is conducting research on how positive norms change is brought about to improve adolescent girls' lives. For instance, the Institute just completed a large project funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) that assessed the effects of a series of communications interventions on progressive norms change in four countries, including Nepal and Viet Nam in Asia. The initial steps included a comprehensive review of existing evidence and the development of a theory of change model. Evaluation tools used to measure change and understand the effects of these programmes on girls, their families and communities, combined collection of attitude data around child marriage with primary qualitative data collected through community mapping, key informant and in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, body mapping and intergenerational trios. Interviews focused on understanding a variety of responses to the intervention, including whether individuals adopt new behaviours that defy, subvert or otherwise challenge prevalent social norms as well as those who continue to act within the dominant paradigm. Interviews are coded qualitatively using MAXQDA software coding structure for research analysis.

Going forward, new programme evaluations aiming to measure and understand norms change are recommended to include and consider the following: First, formative research should include a thorough review of existing evidence including national-level quantitative survey data on attitudes as well as smaller qualitative studies, ethnographies and programme monitoring data. The evaluation itself should combine quantitative and qualitative approaches. Monitoring frameworks should thus collect four types of indicators to better capture norms change: attitudes, e.g., the view that girls should get married soon after puberty; marriage intentions; changing outcomes or practices; and perceptions of prevailing norms. Qualitative participatory techniques are also important because they let us (1) understand the drivers and processes of change as well as what isn't working, and (2) identify potential areas of resistance. Finally, research should go beyond short-term monitoring, to longer-term assessment of programme impacts and social change processes.

Measuring multi-sector programming: Lessons and considerations for ending child marriage

Child marriage is, again, one of the so-called "wicked problems" that requires a multi-sectoral approach; measurement of progress is an additional hurdle. Agencies should examine not only technical inputs, but should look at the process of cross-sector work (and how is it coordinated and implemented), and should measure the strength of the partnership in a deliberate way. In some sectors, there are straightforward ways of integrating components, like adding family health services at an HIV clinic, and thus measurement is also straightforward. Child marriage work requires a sophisticated and nuanced approach, however, that may work better if there is cooperation with other programming that serves to address unequal power relations (such as economic empowerment), poverty (when it disproportionately affects girls and children, as in nutrition), and other forms of violence against women and girls, such as female genital mutilation (FGM).

Although benefits can be multiplied through cooperation, these complex intervention strategies require novel methods of evaluation and an attention to process. Measuring the strength of the partnership can assist in efforts to coordinate M&E frameworks across countries and contexts. Outcome mapping or recording of other progress markers to track and display behaviour of actors at the country level works in tandem with larger frameworks. Countries should do self-assessment exercises to address problems as they arise. Many of the same issues have arisen in the fight to reduce gender-based violence (GBV) and thus taking a close look at evaluations of efforts like USAID's work to reduce GBV may be helpful.

Discussion Panel 2

Some participants wanted more practical advice on how to carry out evaluations, especially given the complex nature of RCTs, and as that many agencies are not equipped with resources (time, funding, or technical expertise) to conduct these kinds of evaluations. How to conduct evaluation in this complex programming space also remained unclear to some. In particular, the strategies described did not clarify what, if any, work could be done to understand changes that were program-induced when change might occur even in the absence of programming. Panellists suggested looking at progress towards addressing root causes instead of progress on narrower goals such as child marriage rates, based on the understanding that integrated development processes necessitate acknowledging that there are many causes and drivers, and to look at indicators that can demonstrate positive changes in those drivers.

The discussion also returned to the idea of norms and how to measure them. One panellist described measuring norms change as trying to measure women's empowerment; it's not just an outcome, but also a process, so one solution is to use proxies. For instance, a survey might try to see if there is a difference in time allocated to household chores. One panellist referred to the historical example of foot-binding in China and how it was eradicated with support from the government, foreign intervention, and rising economic growth that necessitated an increase in women's economic participation and empowerment. An additional mention of extending the discourse beyond ensuring marriage does not take place before the age of 18 came up here again: a concerted focus on the "child" in child marriage

may obscure the idea of consent and empowering adolescents to freely choose marriage and when and if to marry, not just increasing age of marriage to adulthood.

SESSION 6: Marketplace; presentations of child marriage programmes and materials - promising practices

Marketplace presentations: Each UNICEF and UNFPA country office (from the five South Asian countries) presented one strategic intervention that was unique or considered a game changer in the specific country context, in a marketplace format, followed by plenary discussion. Poster presentations made by each of the country offices are pictured below, along with photos of discussion and interaction.

Discussion

Following the marketplace, the group convened for a short discussion on what they had seen in the various presentations. The group complimented the various initiatives, although they (1) wondered how agencies were thinking about sustainability, as the interventions seemed expensive, (2) whether there were robust risk assessments given the focus on girls' empowerment and potential for backlash, and (3) how to better incorporate social media, an element that is lacking although very much liked by donors. There was also a strong call for more cross-fertilization and learning from other countries' programmes, and a better understanding of what is happening with married girls. The importance of improving communication of initiatives, including with donors, but also between agencies and implementers (and to the general public) was also stressed.

Video

Participants were shown a video of girls around the world dancing and singing along with the Spice Girls' famous song, "Wannabe (What I Really, Really Want)," and displaying messages related to ending child marriage, promoting gender equality, and increasing girls' choice and access to education.

(Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sZQ2RUFd54o)

SESSION 7: Recommendations for future research and action

Objective: Based on the discussion during the EGM, panel of 4-5 experts will be asked to give their top 3-5 recommendations for further research/evaluation and programming

A panel of five experts was chosen from among the expert participants gathered at the EGM to discuss their insights from the three-day meeting. The panel was held in a "talk-show" format, where the moderator asked each panellist a series of agreed-upon questions.

Ultimately, we do not yet have effective approaches to end child marriage. We have some information from different projects, but they are very contextualized interventions, and we are currently spending millions of dollars without knowing whether we are getting results. What we do know is that there is a tension between empowering girls and the responsibility that comes with raising aspirations and promoting behaviours and attitudes that are not normative. Agencies and organizations should engage with other sectors to change the opportunities available to girls, to make sure they can do something with their assets and skills. The UN system is well placed to cultivate private sector or other engagement to ensure job opportunities are available for girls in places where programmes are being implemented. Building the evidence base and bringing interventions to scale will need to focus on sustainability, budgets, and costing. Having a better idea of how much interventions cost and getting access to funds in different ministries, and other sources, is paramount, but we need to know

what we are doing. At the same time, costly interventions should not be avoided solely because they are costly, and low-cost evaluations should not be implemented simply because outcomes are easy to measure or because they are cheap. Formative research, thinking about what works and what is actually harmful, building in evaluation as part of programme or intervention design can help to get results, and then to think about how the evaluation may actually change the intervention. We also need to allow for flexibility.

This meeting could not cover every aspect of child marriage. In particular, cooperation between nutrition, education, health and other sectors within government, and within and between agencies, could be promoted, but often it is not. Meetings like this are one avenue to increase cooperation between different actors and sectors and indeed a diverse group were invited to speak. In order to shift the opportunity structure for girls, we must find ways to mobilize other funds and ensure that girls are not relegated to the responsibility of less powerful ministries. We must also learn from the "low-hanging fruit," including small evaluations in the absence of big, formal ones. Bringing these lessons to a global or regional level requires information sharing, which will be done with the presentations in this meeting. The Girls, Not Brides open-source platform is also available as a resource and a repository for information that participants want to share.

The multilateral commitment to end child marriage promoted by SAIEVAC should be leveraged in its current form. At the national level, the Regional Action Plan should be used in a contextual, individualized way to push governments to live up to their commitments, but also it cannot be prescriptive and must be adapted to each country. Going forward, speaking with one voice to multilateral organizations such as SAARC and individual country governments is important. One illustration is the proposed language for the next SAARC declaration "We resolve to make concerted efforts to enact, enforce, and uphold laws and policies aimed at eliminating child marriages. We agree that the age of marriage for both boys and girls shall be set at a minimum of 18 years, and we commit to register all births and marriages.[6]" This means that UN agencies and all partners need to work collectively to get the evidence, pull all of this information together as unified package, and commit together to address what governments are mandated to do.

Cash transfers were viewed rather negatively during discussions throughout the meeting, but they are more likely "here to stay," as certain parts of the evaluation world, governments and the development community, are enamoured of them. Thinking about what it means to put "conditionalities" on cash while promoting choice and empowerment is a thorny but necessary conversation to have.

SESSION 8: Summary of discussion and conclusion

Summary Remarks: Kendra Gregson and Ingrid FitzGerald, organizers

First the organizers offered a few general observations and then moved into remarks about evidence, key drivers and causes, programming, research gaps, and evaluation. Generally, the conversation focused on an assertion that ending child marriage is about rights. There are differing perspectives, meaning the drivers and solutions are complex and many. We have global demands and local realities - specificities of the local context - and global commitments to action. Overall there are a lot of actors and we have not yet defined what each actor can do best, or how they can best work together.

Evidence exists, but as noted above, we do not have all the answers. For instance we know there is a decline in child marriage, yet our programmes do not necessarily account for it. In some cases, programmes are helping, but rather than knowing exactly why, they often raise more questions, which is why we should seek more evidence, both to answer those questions and to challenge assumptions. We understand a lot about the correlations but not a lot about causal relationships, and we should leverage learning from other sectors.

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6   This is draft language for advocacy for the inclusion in the next SAARC Summit declaration.

On drivers and causes, there is first a key definitional question: what is a driver and what is a root cause; how do we differentiate them? Child marriage is an economic transaction that binds families and allies households, but it is also a strategy for managing and controlling sexuality and fertility, especially of adolescent girls. We know gender inequality is a root cause, but how to address masculinity and the ongoing tensions between focusing on women and girls rights versus focusing on gender identity and gender relations remain open questions. There is more work to be done to understand the structural drivers of child marriage.

Theories of change have become more complicated, and while there appears to be agreement that we need to put adolescent girls at the centre, how we achieve change has become less clear. The range of ages at which work should happen needs to expand: it needs to start at earlier ages to change expectations of boys and girls, but also to think beyond 18 as the end. In addition, we need to think more about unintended consequences. As programmes look to sustainability, there are a number of concerns: handing over programming to the government, better understanding the scope and coverage of scaling up - geographic, social, and group-wise, as well as defining what we mean by scaling up. Moreover, how do we reconcile scaling-up with the need for tailored local solutions? Programmes that work across multiple sectors appear to be more successful, but many programmes are still vertically - single-sector - oriented.

Research gaps abound and many were highlighted. Lack of evidence on child grooms, conflict and natural disasters, civil registration, unintended consequences of our interventions, the use of technology and social media and communication, the role of faith and belief systems, and links to trafficking and exploitation were among those identified. Additionally, taking a longer view of the problem was desired by participants, both going back to historical trajectories and the associated perspective inconsistencies, and then identifying the lasting impact of interventions - what happens to beneficiaries in 10 to 15 years?

The increasingly complex TOCs and partnerships require different ways of measuring. RCTs are not the answer, or at least not the whole answer. Evaluation must enable programming rather than limit it, but there remain challenges, for example, the challenge of capturing processes and pathways of change versus more static indicators. How quickly are we rotating monitoring and learning back into programming? We must be more open about our failures and more willing to talk about them. There is an overarching concern that in the quest for understanding what works, we may be overly relying on surveillance of girls, their families and communities in a way that violates privacy and complicates evaluation ethics. There are tensions between short and longer-term results, being donor-driven versus girl-driven, and on questions of causality.

Closing Remarks

Ms. Yoriko Yasukawa, UNFPA APRO Regional Director, closed the meeting by congratulating and thanking the participants for the open and honest discussion and interesting summary. She emphasized the value of the UNFPA-UNICEF partnership and encouraged it to be even more open to collaboration in order to work together to push the end child marriage agenda forward. In particular she stressed how this partnership within and beyond the UN system is important in thinking about the empowerment of girls and how to move toward opportunities for girls to develop their potential to do things with their lives. We must bring in other actors so that girls have other opportunities including for education and employment. The effort to eliminate child marriage is not just about child marriage, but a different vision of "what's society." We must be careful not to let this term get in the way; child marriage is not an aberration in society, but is part of a larger expression of how we view one another, how we view power, and how we view women and girls in the process of development. She stressed that ending child marriage is about systemic change and trying to build better, more just societies.

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Annex I Agenda

Expert Group Meeting on the Evidence Base for Accelerated Action to End Child Marriage in South Asia, 26-28 September 2016

Bangkok, Thailand

OBJECTIVES

The overall objective of the meeting is to identify what works to end child marriage in South Asia in order to inform actions to accelerate ending this practice. The result will be a common understanding of effective strategies and approaches for implementation, monitoring and evaluation of child marriage interventions. Specific objectives include to:

- Examine selected promising practices in child marriage interventions at regional and country level, including interventions that have been robustly evaluated.
- Based on presentation and discussion of promising interventions, refine a common understanding of successful strategies to end child marriage in South Asia.
- Discuss and explore methodologies and approaches for monitoring and evaluating interventions and assessing impact.
- Identify key priorities for additional research on and/or evaluation of programmes and interventions to end child marriage.

PARTICIPANTS

UNICEF and UNFPA regional and country office focal points for child marriage in South Asia. Recognized experts, researchers, academics and practitioners working in the field of child marriage, with a particular focus on high prevalence countries in South Asia.

DATES AND VENUE

The Expert Group Meeting will take place from 26–28 September 2016 at the Amari Watergate Hotel (See administrative note for details).

AGENDA

DAY 1: 26 September 2016

8:30–9:00   Registration/Coffee

INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME

9:00-9:10   *Ms Yoriko Yasukawa, Regional Director – UNFPA Asia-Pacific Regional Office*

9:10–9:20   *Ms Jean Gough, Regional Director – UNICEF South Asia Regional Office*

9:20–9:45   *Presentation of the agenda*
Kendra Gregson, Regional Adviser, Child Protection, UNICEF ROSA

Ingrid FitzGerald, Gender and Human Rights Adviser, UNFPA APRO

SESSION 1   *The state of the evidence/state of play on ending child marriage – what we know now*

Objective: To present and discuss the current state of evidence and data on child marriage globally, and the need for a comprehensive approach.

9:45-10.45   *Panel 1:* Global trends and perspectives

Dr Laura Laski, Chief, Sexual and Reproductive Branch, Technical Division, UNFPA (virtual presentation) - Overview of global trends and data on child marriage in the context of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs

Heather Hamilton, Deputy Executive Director, Girls Not Brides – Girls Not Brides Theory of Change on child marriage

Dr Quentin Wodon, Adviser, Education Sector World Bank (virtual presentation) – Global study on the costs of child marriage

Moderator: *Jean Gough, Regional Director UNICEF ROSA*

10.45-11:15   *Discussion*

11:15-11:30   Coffee break

11.30-12.30   *Panel 2:* Current trends and factors influencing child marriage in South Asia: an overview

Kendra Gregson, Regional Adviser, Child Protection, UNICEF ROSA – Overview of UNICEF regional data on child marriage in South Asia

Rasa Sekulovic, Regional Head of Child Protection, Plan International - Research on driving factors on child marriage in Asia

Mary E. John, Senior Fellow, Centre for Women's Development Studies (CWDS), New Delhi - Child marriage, harmful practices and gender inequalities: challenges from India

Moderator: Yoriko Yasukawa, Regional Director, UNFPA APRO

12.30-13.00   *Discussion*

13:00–14:00   Lunch

14:00-15:00   *Panel 3:* Current trends and factors influencing child marriage in South Asia: creating an enabling environment for change

               Dr Rinchen Chophel, Director General, SAIEVAC - Regional commitments and initiatives to end child marriage

               Purna Shreshta, Senior Legal Adviser, Centre for Reproductive Rights – Legal frameworks on child marriage – country and regional analysis

               Azra Abdul Cader, Senior Programme Offcer, ARROW– Creating an enabling environment for change: realizing girls SRHR

               Moderator: Ingrid FitzGerald, Gender and Human Rights Adviser, APRO

15:00-15:30   *Discussion*

15:30-15:45   Coffee break

SESSION 2   *Effective programme interventions on child marriage: the evidence for change*

               <u>Objective:</u> To present and discuss the evidence base for interventions to end child marriage including interventions that have been robustly evaluated, and promising practices.

15:45-16:45   *Panel 1:* Effective programme interventions – a global and regional perspective

               Susan Lee-Rife, Lee-Rife Research, Overview of the global evidence to end child marriage

               Erin Fletcher – Independent Consultant – Presentation of background paper for the expert group meeting: approaches and interventions to end child marriage in South Asia

               Moderator: Federica Di Stefano, Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF Pakistan

17:45-17:15   *Discussion*

17:15-17:30   Closing of Day 1

18:00   Reception

DAY 2: 27 September 2016

8:30-9.00   Coffee

9.00-9:15   Key messages/takeaways from Day 1 (UNFPA/UNICEF co-chairs)

9:15-10:15   *Panel 2:* Selected country initiatives

                 Ravi Verma, Regional Director, ICRW – *Impact of Conditional Cash Transfers on age at marriage – India*

                 Dr Rob Ubaidur, Bangladesh Country Director Population Council – *Bangladeshi Association for Life Skills, Income and Knowledge for Adolescents (BALIKA) – Bangladesh*

                 Shobhana Boyle, UNFPA Country Office India – *Interventions using Conditional Cash Transfers to prevent child marriage – India*

                 <u>*Moderator:*</u> *Roshni Basu, Gender and Development Specialist, UNICEF Bangladesh*

10:15-10:45   *Discussion*

10:45-11.00   Coffee break

<u>**SESSION 3**</u>   *Other initiatives that impact on child marriage – what can we learn?*

                 <u>Objective:</u> To discuss the contribution and impact of programmes promoting life skills, education, girl's empowerment and other initiatives to reduce child marriage

11:00-12.00   *Panel: Selected regional and country initiatives targeting adolescent girls*

                 Habibur Rahman, Program Head, Gender Justice and Diversity Program, BRAC – *Adolescent Development Programme (ADP)/Employment and Livelihood for Adolescents (ELA) – Bangladesh, Girls Education Challenge (GEC) and Community Based Girl's Education Project (GEP) - Afghanistan*

                 Jane Calder, Regional Advisor, Child Protection, Asia, Save the Children – *Initiatives supporting adolescent girls to thrive – South Asia*

                 Dr Mahesh Srinivas, Program Director, Pathfinder International India - *Learning from the PRACHAR project, India*

                 <u>*Moderator:*</u> *Kristine Blokhus, Deputy Country Representative, UNFPA Nepal*

12:00-12:30   *Discussion*

12:30-13:30   Lunch

SESSION 4 *Changing the norms that support child marriage: mobilizing communities for change*

Objective: To discuss initiatives designed to mobilize communities for change to end child marriage

13:30-14:30 *Panel 1: Working with faith based organisations to end child marriage*

Jessy Augustine, Manager, Gender and Development World Vision, India
- Working with faith based organisations in India

Seema Kahn, Chairperson, National Interfaith Network Nepal – Working with faith based organisations to end child marriage in Nepal

Moderator: *Sulaf Mustafa, Gender Specialist, UNFPA Afghanistan*

14:30-15:00 *Discussion*

15:00-15:15 Coffee break

15:15-16:30 *Panel 2:* Working with men and boys to change social norms that support child marriage

Dr Giovanna Lauro, Deputy Director, International Programmes, Promundo, Engaging men and boys to end the practice of child marriage – a global perspective

Yeva Avakyan, Senior Advisor, Gender and Evaluation, World Vision US - Engaging men and boys to end child marriage.

Leena Sushant, Director Monitoring and Evaluation, Breakthrough – Nation Against Early Marriage / national media campaigns to end child marriage – India/Bangladesh

Satish Kumar Singh, Deputy Director, Centre for Health and Social Justice (CHSJ), MenEngage – Engaging men and boys to change gender norms and promote gender equality – South Asia (Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka)

Moderator: *Ms. Yukiko Sakurai, Chief, Adolescent Development and Participation (ADAP), UNICEF Nepal*

16:30-17:00 *Discussion*

17.00-17.30 Advance presentation: Session 5 Measuring child marriage interventions

Dr Alexandra Avdeenko and Dr Juanita Vasquez-Escallon, University of Mannhiem (virtual presentation) Impact evaluation of UNICEF programme: Improving Adolescents' Lives in South Asia (Bangladesh, India and Pakistan), funded by Ikea Foundation

Discussion

17:30 Closing of Day 2

DAY 3: 28 September 2016

8:30-8:45   *Coffee*

8:45-9:00   Key messages/takeaways from Day 2 (UNFPA/UNICEF Co-chairs)

SESSION 5   *Measuring child marriage interventions: experiences from the region, and learning from other sectors.*

Objective: To discuss and reflect on different approaches to evaluating impact of child marriage interventions based on experience in the region, as well as global experiences measuring and evaluating complex, multi-stakeholder interventions that are similar in scope to the global programme on child marriage.

09:00-10:00 *Panel 1: Experience from the region – measuring change and impact*

Sajeda Amin, Senior Associate, Population Council – Randomized controlled trials (RCTs) - Bangladesh

Kay Engelhardt, Independent Consultant, UNICEF India – Monitoring adolescent empowerment and child marriage interventions: UNICEF India's M&E framework

Milkah Kihunah, Senior Policy Advisor, CARE USA – Tipping Point: An illustration of applying developmental and feminist monitoring, evaluation and learning approaches to child marriage programming in Nepal and Bangladesh

Moderator: *Mr. Jean Lieby, Chief of Child Protection, UNICEF Afghanistan and Bangladesh (tbc)*

10:00-10:30 *Discussion*

10:30-11:00 Coffee break

11:00-12:00 *Panel 2: Experience from other sectors & regions: measuring and evaluating impact of complex interventions*

Dr David Rose, Senior Lecturer, Social Work, University of Melbourne - Evaluating collective impact

Maria Stavropoulou, Senior Research Officer, ODI – Measuring change in adolescent girls' lives.

Tricia Petruney, Technical Adviser in Research Utilization, FHI 360 (virtual presentation) – Measuring multi-sector programming: Lessons and considerations for ending child marriage

Moderator: *Ingrid FitzGerald, Gender and Human Rights Adviser, UNFPA APRO*

12:00-12:30 *Discussion*

12:30-13:30 Lunch

SESSION 6   *Marketplace: Presentations of child marriage programmes and materials: promising practices*

Facilitators: UNICEF/UNFPA co-chairs

13:30-15:30   *Marketplace presentations – each UNICEF and UNFPA Country Office (from the 5 South Asian countries) will present ONE strategic intervention which is unique/a game changer in the specific country context, in a marketplace format – followed by plenary discussion. Experts participating in the expert group meeting will also be present to give feedback in plenary.*

15:30-15:45   Coffee Break

SESSION 7   *Recommendations for future research and action*

Objective: Based on the discussion during the EGM, panel of 4-5 experts to give their top 3-5 recommendations for further research/evaluation and programming

15:45-16:30   *Panel: [Panelists selected from participants]*

Moderator: Kendra Gregson, Regional Adviser, Child Protection, UNICEF ROSA

16:30-17:00   *Discussion*

SESSION 8   *Summary of Discussion and Conclusion*

17:00-17:20   Summary of key themes and messages from UNFPA/UNICEF Co-chairs

CLOSING REMARKS

17:20-17:30   *Yoriko Yasukawa, Regional Director, UNFPA APRO*

Annex II Participant List

	Name	Title/Organization
1	Ms. Yoriko Yasukawa	Regional Director, UNFPA Asia and the Pacific Regional Office (APRO)
2	Ms. Jean Gough	Regional Director, UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia (ROSA)
Panellists		
3	Dr. Laura Laski	Chief, Sexual and Reproductive Health Branch, Technical Division, UNFPA HQ
4	Ms. Heather Hamilton	Deputy Executive Director, Girls Not Brides
5	Mr. Quentin Wodon	Adviser, Education Sector, World Bank
6	Mr. Raša Sekulović	Regional Head of Child Protection, Plan International, Asia Regional Office
7	Dr. Mary E. John	Senior Fellow, Centre for Women's Development Studies
8	Dr. Rinchen Chophel	Director General, South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC)
9	Ms. Purna Shrestha	Senior Legal Adviser, Center for Reproductive Rights
10	Ms. Azra Abdul Cader	Senior Programme Officer - Inter-Faith Advocacy for SRHR, the Asian-Pacific Resource & Research Centre for Women (ARROW)
11	Ms. Susan Lee-Rife	Consulting Social Demographer & Applied Social Science Researcher/Evaluation Specialist, Lee-Rife Research
12	Ms. Erin Fletcher	Independent Consultant, EGM Child Marriage, UNFPA APRO
13	Mr. Ravi Verma	Regional Director for the International Center for Research on Women's (ICRW) Asia Regional Office
14	Dr. Rob Ubaidur	Bangladesh Country Director, Population Council
15	Mr. Habibur Rahman	Program Head, Gender Justice and Diversity Program, BRAC
16	Ms. Jane Calder	Regional Advisor, Child Protection, Asia, Save the Children
17	Dr. Mahesh Srinivas	Programme Director, Pathfinder International India
18	Ms. Jessy Augustine	Manager, Gender and Development, World Vision India
19	Ms. Seema Kahn	Chairperson, National Interfaith Network Nepal
20	Dr. Giovanna Lauro	Deputy Director, International Programmes, Promundo
21	Ms. Yeva Avakyan	Senior Adviser, Gender and Evaluation, World Vision US

22	Ms. Leena Sushant	Director Monitoring and Evaluation, Breakthrough
23	Mr. Satish Kumar Singh	Deputy Director, Centre for Health and Social Justice (CHSJ), MenEngage
24	Dr. Alexandra Avdeenko	University of Mannhiem
25	Dr. Juanita Vasquez-Escallon	University of Mannhiem
26	Ms. Sajeda Amin	Senior Associate, Population Council
27	Mr. Kay Engelhardt	Independent Consultant, UNICEF
28	Ms. Milkah Kihunah	Senior Policy Adviser, CARE USA
29	Dr. David Rose	Senior Lecturer, Social Work, University of Melbourne
30	Ms. Maria Stavropoulou	Senior Research Officer, Social Development, Overseas Development Institute (ODI)
31	Ms. Tricia Petruney	Technical Adviser in Research Utilization, FHI360
	UN Regional Offices	
32	Ms. Gerda Binder	Gender Advisor, UNICEF EAPRO
33	Ms. Kendra Gregson	Regional Adviser Child Protection, UNICEF ROSA
34	Ms. Melissa Alvarado	EVAW Programme Specialist/UNiTE Programme Manager, UN Women Asia and the Pacific
35	Ms. Lubna Baqi	Deputy Director, UNFPA APRO
36	Ms. Ingrid Fitzgerald	Technical Advisor on Gender and Human Rights, UNFPA APRO
37	Dr. Josephine Sauvarin	Technical Advisor on HIV and ASRH, UNFPA APRO
38	Ms. Sujata Tuladhar	GBV Specialist, UNFPA APRO
39	Ms. Marleen van der Ree	Consultant, Gender Specialist, UNFPA APRO
40	Ms. Natsuda Suwatthanabunpot	Programme Assistant, UNFPA APRO
	UN Country Offices	
41	Ms. Sulaf Mustafa	Gender Specialist, UNFPA Afghanistan
42	Dr. Noor Muhammad Murad	National Youth Consultant, UNFPA Afghanistan
43	Ms. Eshani Ruwanpura	Programme Specialist - Adolescents and Youth, UNFPA Bangladesh
44	Mr. Kumar Manish	State Programme Officer, UNFPA India
45	Ms. Shobhana Boyle	National Programme Officer, Gender, UNFPA India
46	Ms. Frederika Meijer	Representative, UNFPA Lao PDR
47	Ms. Kristine Blokhus	Deputy Representative, UNFPA Nepal
48	Mr. Ram Thapa	Regional Development Coordinator, UNFPA Nepal
49	Mr. Hari Bhusal	Sexual & Reproductive Health Technical Officer, UNFPA Nepal

50	Ms. Sarah Masale	Deputy Representative, UNFPA Pakistan
51	Ms. Wassana Im-em	Assistant Representative, UNFPA Thailand
52	Ms. Hien Phan	Programme Specialist, Gender, UNFPA Viet Nam
53	Mr. Jean Antoine Lieby	Chief of Child Protection, UNICEF Afghanistan and Bangladesh
54	Ms. Roshni Basu	Gender and Development Specialist, UNICEF Bangladesh
55	Mr. Aniruddha Kulkarni	Child Protection Specialist Head, Child Protection and Adolescent Development and Participation Section, , UNICEF Bhutan
56	Ms. Annie Nut	Zone Chief, UNICEF Cambodia
57	Ms. Arupa Shukla	Communication for Development Specialist (Adolescent & HIV), UNICEF India
58	Ms. Emilie Minnick	Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF Indonesia
59	Ms. Maliphet Soukhaseum	Education Specialist, UNICEF Lao PDR
60	Ms. Phenny Kakama	Senior Child Protection Specialist , UNICEF Malaysia
61	Ms. Yukiko Sakurai	Chief, Adolescent Development and Participation (ADAP), UNICEF Nepal
62	Ms. Pragya Shah Karki	Youth and Adolescent Development Specialist, UNICEF Nepal
63	Ms. Federica Di Stefano	Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF Pakistan
64	Ms. Kuttiparambil Beena	Chief Adolescents, HIV/AIDS, UNICEF Thailand
65	Ms. Vu Thi Lt Thanh	Child Protection Officer, UNICEF Viet Nam
66	Ms. Anju Pandey	Programme Specialist, EVAW unit, UN Women Multi-Country Office for India, Bhutan, Maldives and Sri Lanka
67	Ms Leika Aruga	UNV Programme Specialist, UN Women Viet Nam

Annex III

Background Paper for the Expert Group Meeting on the Evidence Base for Accelerated Action to End Child Marriage
Bangkok, Thailand, September 26 to 28, 2016

Erin K. Fletcher, Ph.D.
November 30, 2016

1. Introduction and Background

Global trends and perspectives

Child marriage is a global problem, spanning continents and cultures. While 88% of countries have laws prohibiting marriage of girls under age 18, many also allow child marriages to take place with parental consent (World Policy Analysis Center 2015). Although child marriage is not exclusive to girls, many more girls are affected than are boys, highlighting the gendered nature of the problem, and informing potential solutions. Over 700 million women alive today were married as children and each year 15 million more girls are married before they turn 18 (UNICEF 2014). While prevalence rates are lower among boys, and while girls are most often married off to older men, over 156 million men alive today were also married as children (UNICEF 2014). It was these persistently high rates of child marriage that prompted the United Nations to adopt elimination of child marriage as part of its gender equality goal within the 2030 Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) framework, under Target 5.3 on harmful practices.

Despite these high numbers, there is also evidence that the rate of child marriage is indeed declining, albeit slowly, and some estimates suggest that child marriage rates may have fallen by more than 20% among cohorts born between 1955 and 1959 compared to those born between 1985 and 1989 (Nguyen and Wodon 2014). Rates remain high in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, however, so these global declines necessitate a rethinking of the problem and an examination of the solutions that have thus far been implemented and evaluated by NGOs and multilateral organizations. It is unlikely that existing interventions have been at sufficient scale to yield such large declines in global marriage, warranting a re-examination of the impact of policy and programmatic interventions.

The focus of this background paper is child marriage, defined as "marriages in which at least one of the parties is a child." Also included in this definition is a marriage where one or more parties is unable to freely and fully consent; child marriage is thus forced marriage, as children are unable to consent (United Nations 2014).

Child marriage is associated with profound negative consequences. Adolescents who marry young are less likely to complete school, stifling lifetime earnings and limiting future opportunities for both education and labour force participation (UNFPA 2012). They also can suffer from social isolation and increased risk of gender-based violence (GBV) (Wodon et al. 2015). Girls who marry young also tend to give birth earlier and more often throughout their lives, contributing to higher rates of maternal and infant mortality (Raj 2010). Higher fertility rates also accelerate population growth, putting pressure on impoverished and food-insecure communities. Even when pregnancies are safely brought to term, there are drawbacks to early motherhood including inability to attend school or work outside the home, all of which are associated with lower incomes and the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

Over 90% of births to adolescents occur within marriage, further limiting a girl's opportunities due to household and childcare responsibilities (Wodon et al. 2015). On a macro level, high rates of child marriage and its accompanying problems are compounded in large populations, contributing to lower economic growth and necessitating higher social spending to combat associated problems (Parsons et al. 2015).

South Asia overview

With its high numbers of child brides, South Asia is an important region for understanding drivers of child marriage, and how best to address it. The region is home to almost half of all child brides globally, and a full third of all child brides reside in India. Among women aged 20 to 24 in South Asia, 45% were married or in union before the age of 18, and 17% were married before the age of 15 (UNICEF 2015). Prevalence rates among women aged 20 to 24 are the highest in Bangladesh, at 59%, but the rates in India are similarly high, at 47%. Prevalence in Nepal is 37% and in Afghanistan is 33%. Pakistan has a prevalence rate of child marriage at 21% (Gregson 2016).

Boys are affected too. Among men aged 20 to 24, 11%[7] in Nepal and upwards of 15% in some Indian states were married between ages 15 and 20.[8] In one district in Nepal, 62% of adult men were married by age 19 (CARE 2016).

Like other parts of the world, the practice of child marriage has declined in South Asia over time, from 63% in 1985 to 45% in 2010 for girls under 18, and from 32% in 1985 to 17% in 2010 for girls under 15 (Nguyen and Wodon 2015). Cohort analysis shows that women aged 20 to 24 are much less likely to have been married at 18 than women aged 45 to 49 in South Asian countries. Afghanistan and Bhutan are the exceptions, where rates have remained relatively constant. Pakistan and the Maldives have achieved the fastest reductions in child marriage, and in Bangladesh, the largest declines are in groups aged 15 and younger (Gregson et al. 2016).

South Asia is also home to a number of initiatives to combat child marriage, ranging from interventions aimed at empowering and educating girls, to providing cash transfers to encourage parents to delay marriage. UNICEF and UNFPA are implementing the Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage in South Asia (2015-2018), in Nepal, India, and Bangladesh. At a meeting of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) member states and partner organisations in 2014, members of the South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC) adopted the Kathmandu Call for Action to End Child Marriage, signalling significant support from government representatives and multilateral organizations on the issue (SAIEVAC 2014).

Creating an enabling environment for change

Increasingly, research shows that ending child marriage is a human rights imperative as well as a practical step to fostering economic development and growth. There exist effective and promising interventions to reduce child marriage rates and delay age at marriage, but many challenges remain. Creating an enabling environment for change, from ensuring legal frameworks are supportive and effective, to poverty alleviation and health and education interventions, is a complicated process that necessitates coordination and efforts by many actors. South Asia is well equipped to tackle child marriage, with a number of agencies coordinating efforts through programmes like SAIEVAC and the South Asian Coordinating Group (SACG) on Action against Violence against Children (UNFPA and UNICEF 2016). The evidence base for determining how best to harness these efforts is currently low, however, with few rigorously evaluated programmes and interventions. Establishing and understanding a sound evidence base to support programming and policy is paramount to future success.

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7   Calculated from Nepal Demographic Health Survey 2011 by UNICEF ROSA staff.
8   Calculated from Indian Census 2011 by UNICEF ROSA staff. In India, the legal age of marriage for men is 21.

The Expert Group Meeting and aim of this background paper

UNFPA APRO and UNICEF ROSA are committed to coordinated efforts to reduce child marriage rates in South Asia and as part of this on-going commitment, the two organizations hosted a three-day expert group meeting from September 26 to 28, 2016, in Bangkok, to examine promising interventions to address child marriage in South Asia, based on available evaluation and research. This paper served as a background to that meeting, providing a brief discussion of the issues around child marriage and building on the report, "Mapping of Child Marriage Initiatives in South Asia," undertaken by UNICEF ROSA and UNFPA APRO in 2015. This background paper had three primary aims: (1) to succinctly outline some of the key drivers of child marriage; (2) to highlight programmatic and policy areas where evidence is strong and those where it is not; and (3) to provide some guiding questions for discussion at the meeting. Recognizing that each of the attending participants was an expert in child marriage, the background paper served to provide an overview of existing knowledge and give participants a common starting point from which to delve deeper into the drivers of, and interventions to address, child marriage. Neither this paper nor the meeting could sufficiently cover the vast and evolving landscape around promising interventions, key gap areas, and measurement, however, so this paper aimed only to provide touch points and ideas that could be further explored during the meeting.

This paper is organised as follows. Section Two provides an overview of the mapping exercise conducted in 2015. Section Three discusses drivers of child marriage such as poverty and conflict. Next, in Section Four, a selection of promising or effective interventions in various areas is highlighted. Section Five discusses the need for a strengthened evidence base, how to weight various strategies for evaluation, and the need for agreement on what constitutes evidence. Finally, Section Six summarises goals for the meeting and sets out some guiding key questions for discussion.

2. Summary of Child Marriage Interventions in South Asia: Mapping Exercise

As part of UNICEF and UNFPA's Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage (2015-2018), UNFPA APRO and UNICEF ROSA commissioned a mapping exercise of child marriage initiatives in South Asia (UNFPA and UNICEF 2016). This report identified key strategies being used in policy and programme initiatives to delay age at marriage and reduce child, early, and forced marriage in the region. The report also identified programmes that targeted adolescent girls, such as sexual and reproductive health initiatives, that appeared to make an impact on child marriage rates, even if that was not their explicit or primary aim.

The report found nine significant regional advocacy or coordinating groups working on child marriage in South Asia. Consisting of government officials, donor groups, UN agencies and NGOs, these groups have diverse aims. They cover a range of goals including: ending violence against children; legal initiatives to register births and marriages; women and children's empowerment; education, livelihoods, and skills training; sexual and reproductive health, and more.

The report identified on-going or recently completed programmes addressing child marriage in various countries in South Asia, including 11 in Afghanistan, 23 in Bangladesh, 3 in Bhutan, 22 in India, 16 in Nepal, and 11 in Pakistan. None were found in Sri Lanka, where child marriage rates have traditionally not been high, but may have risen as a result of recent conflict, or in the Maldives, although UNICEF has launched an initiative with the government there to reduce violence against children. Some programmes also operate in multiple countries, such as CARE's Tipping Point, which works in Nepal and India (CARE 2014).

Most of the programmes identified can be described as multi-sectoral, or "whole girl," in that they targeted multiple outcomes including empowerment, education, livelihoods or skills training, legal frameworks, behavioural change, attitudinal change, and more. Some are single-area interventions, focusing on one goal, such as social norms change or sexual and reproductive health service provision.

Many initiatives also employed some sort of community education or communication to better inform parents and children about the health and economic risks associated with child marriage. However, the authors of the mapping caution that negative information alone is likely not sufficient to change behaviour, and in some cases, may actually reinforce undesirable norms.

The mapping project also discovered an absence of programmes in key gap areas and emerging areas of interest despite the overall proliferation of initiatives on child marriage. For instance, the paper did not find initiatives targeting the demand side of the marriage market, including child grooms and their families, initiatives to strengthen birth and marriage registrations, or initiatives to provide services to married girls. Neither did it find programmes targeting child grooms, underscoring how little is known about the effects of child marriage on them, how best to address their needs, and how to prevent child marriage among boys.

The programmes that were identified were largely not rigorously evaluated, so while many initiatives exist, very little is actually known about their effectiveness. The limited evaluations that do exist make it difficult to assess not only what strategies are effective, but why. Determining the best way forward in evaluating existing and future programming is therefore important to our understanding of effective programming, policy, and advocacy.

The Global Programme for Accelerated Action to End Child Marriage: Theory of Change

UNICEF and UNFPA's "Global Programme Theory of Change" (ToC) guides the agenda and discussion for the EGM. The overarching framework views child marriage as a function of intersecting structural and socio-economic drivers. These include: poverty; lack of educational and economic opportunities; social expectations of behaviour, discrimination against girls/restrictive gender roles; beliefs about protection of girls; and low awareness of or access to alternatives. Ultimately, the ToC is based on the assumption that girls' empowerment and engaging young people as agents of change are paramount.

The Global Programme Theory of Change thus focuses on five main strategies:

- Empowering girls with information, skills and support networks.

- Educating and mobilizing parents and community members.

- Offering economic support and incentives for girls and their families.

- Enhancing the accessibility and quality of formal schooling and health services for girls.

- Fostering an enabling legal and policy framework and improving the knowledge and evidence base.

The Global Programme sets out to achieve the following impact: "Girls fully enjoy their childhood free from the risk of marriage; they experience healthier, safer, and more empowered life transitions while in control of their own destiny, including making choices and decisions about their education, sexuality, relationship formation, marriage, and childbearing."

3. Summary of Key Issues and Agenda Items

This section discusses key drivers covered in the agenda, what is known about the evidence base for child marriage work, working with different actors, key gap areas, and more. These headings broadly cover the EGM agenda, but also include key issues for discussion that will not be specifically covered at the EGM.

Key drivers of child marriage

Poverty

A family or household's economic conditions can play a big role in deciding whether or not to marry off a child, regardless of her or his age. Routine costs of maintaining another mouth to feed increase as a child gets older and needs more nutrition. Keeping children in school adds to those costs. School fees, books, and uniforms also can represent a significant financial burden; even where education is free, the "opportunity cost" of keeping a child in school is high when he or she could be working for pay or doing household chores. And in cases where these costs are not seen as an investment in future income, such as when women have fewer opportunities to work or when the salaries they do earn go to a husband's family, children are at higher risk for marriage, particularly girls.

In communities where dowry, "bridewealth," and "brideprice" are traditional or expected, there are additional pressures to marry young. Families of the grooms often demand smaller dowry payments or offer a higher bride price when a girl is younger and sexually inexperienced. And in situations of poverty, the stress of saving or borrowing enough for a dowry is exacerbated in families with more than one girl, where families must come up with money for multiple dowries.

Further, there are costs to the national economy. For example, in Nepal, considered solely from the labour market perspective, the overall cost of child marriage nationally is conservatively estimated at almost 75,000 million Nepalese rupees (NRs), or about 700 million USD. In 2014 this represented 3.87% of gross domestic product (GDP) (Rabi, 2014). India loses an estimated 56 billion USD a year in potential earnings because of adolescent pregnancy, high secondary school dropout rates, and joblessness among young women (ICRW 2013).

Conflct and shocks to income

An increased focus on girls' vulnerability to gender-based violence in conflict has brought particular attention to the problem of child marriage. Communities that are displaced by conflict often experience a breakdown of social and income-generating networks along with decreased earning ability. The reasons for marrying off children early in these situations can be purely economic, such as obtaining a dowry on the boy's side, or reducing the number of mouths to feed on the girl's side. The lack of a stable and safe environment might also lead to an increased focus on girls' suitability for marriage. Parental fears that rape and other violence that may render girls unmarriageable could also result in earlier marriage (Women's Refugee Commission 2016).

Geographic and environmental conditions

Although not sufficient on their own to induce child marriage, geographic and environmental conditions, often made salient by poverty or social/cultural norms, also present risk factors for child marriage.

Understanding seasonality helps to identify times of the year when children may be more at risk for child marriage. Festival seasons often involve gatherings of family members and friends, where parents may have more opportunities or even feel pressured to arrange a marriage. Or, in communities where many of the men migrate for work, financial pressure to support the migrating family member may

lead parents to marry off a child early. Studies examining marriage in the Terai communities of Nepal and the Haor areas of Bangladesh, for example, suggest that poor Hindu boys are likely to be married off before migrating for work, and poor Muslims are more likely marry upon return (CARE 2015).

Shocks to income as a result of unusually heavy or light rains, other environmental disasters, or climate change may also lead to more child marriage. For example, after the 2005 Indian Ocean Tsunami, in Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and India, there were periods where young girls were being married to "tsunami widowers" as a way to obtain state subsidies for marrying and starting a family (UNFPA 2012). The economic hardship and food insecurity associated with famine and disaster may make it more appealing to have one less mouth to feed, or may lead to the decision to marry girls off to older men, who are perceived to be better able to take care of them (Save the Children 2014).

Lack of voice & lack of agency

One key risk for child marriage is that in many countries in the region, children are largely not afforded the responsibility or agency to make their own choices regarding either age at marriage or marriage partner. In areas where child marriage is common, decisions about a girl's marriage are left to the parents, supported by family members and community, with little input from the child concerned. That children are unable to freely and fully consent to their own marriage constitutes a violation of their rights (United Nations 2014). Many interventions are predicated on the idea that empowering girls, in tandem with educating parents and communities, can be effective at reducing child marriage.

Gender inequality and unequal power relations

Underscoring lack of voice and lack of agency are gender inequality and unequal power relations. Both boys and girls may suffer from lack of agency in decisions related to marriage, but girls are additionally subject to unequal power relations arising from gender inequality, patriarchal structures, and gendered laws and norms. Girls are often seen as less valuable than boys or may be valued primarily for their ability to bear children and "keep a house." Lack of inheritance rights, access to education and jobs, and other cultural or legal gender inequalities then exacerbate these unequal power relations. These all make marriage more likely for a girl, as it is often seen as her best option for survival (Brown 2012; UNICEF 2012).

Child marriage reinforces women and girls' primary responsibility for unpaid care work and robs them of bargaining power in the household, including decision-making power over their own lives and those of their children. Especially when poverty interacts with lack of opportunities for girls, parents are less likely to keep girls in school and may be more likely to marry them off at a young age.

Cultural and social norms

Cultural and social norms partially guide these behaviours, and addressing these norms has thus informed the design of recent initiatives to end child marriage. Social norms are individuals' perceptions of community behaviour or belief, and cultural norms are rules or informal agreement on what is considered appropriate or normal behaviour, beliefs, values and attitudes within a cultural or religious group. Other norms may also influence behaviour, including through fear of social stigma (Cooper, Paluck, and Fletcher 2013; Marcus and Harper 2014). Lack of educational opportunities for girls, and lack of knowledge, can then compound families' belief that *not* complying with perceived norms may result in poor outcomes for them and for the girl herself.

The norms that potentially affect child marriage rates include, but are not limited to, a sense of tradition and social obligation, stigma around pre-marital sex and pregnancy out of wedlock, negative stereotypes toward older girls who are still unmarried (they are often considered impure and unmarriageable), and the belief that religion prescribes early marriage for girls (Plan 2013).

Vocal leaders reinforcing these beliefs, lack of educational or income-earning opportunities, poverty and other factors may then make these norms salient, influencing child marriage rates. For instance, a father might agree to marry off his daughter before age 18 if he believes that she will not be able to marry in the future due to social stigma, and that he would not be able to afford a dowry for her later in life. Here, the perceived norm that older girls are more expensive to marry off is compounded by poverty, and thus affects his behaviour. It is important to note too that norms may influence behaviour even when personal beliefs *differ* from the norm. A father might not want to marry off his daughter at16, but, fearing social and financial repercussions, might still choose to comply.

Legal frameworks

Legal frameworks have slowly been incorporating more laws against child marriage, but ultimately provide little protection for children entering forced marriages. In South Asia, the legal age of marriage officially precludes children from marriage in most countries, but there are many exceptions and existing laws often allow marriage for girls at a younger age. In Nepal, boys and girls can be married at 20. In India and Bangladesh, girls can be married at 18, boys at 21. In Pakistan and Afghanistan, girls may marry as young as 16, though boys cannot marry until 18 (WHO 2016). Where laws do exist, their ultimate efficacy at changing the practice of child marriage is unknown, partially due to parental exceptions, and partially due to a lack of evaluation and evidence.

Additionally, enforcement of laws prohibiting child marriage is difficult and complicated. Where marriage and birth registrations are available, but not mandated, or are largely unavailable, identifying child marriages before they go into effect is not an easy task, particularly in rural areas where administrative resources are limited.

Beyond the administrative challenges, choosing how to, and to what extent to, enforce the law is also fraught. Criminalizing child marriage means identifying an actor who is responsible for the marriage. When the actors are many—parents, in-laws, aunts and uncles who made arrangements, religious or community figures—choosing who to prosecute is difficult. Combining that decision with the likely poverty of the actors means that prosecuting a father could leave a family in even more dire economic circumstances, contributing to future early marriages for other girl children.

Especially where these laws come into conflict with social norms and religious or customary legal frameworks, they may not be effective (Scolaro et al. 2015). Further, local administrative or religious authorities may not be properly incentivized to enforce the law and may even be contributing to the problem by performing, or tacitly (or overtly) *approving* of, marriages involving children.

Structural factors

Structural factors such as education, geography and job access or market access also contribute to child marriage rates. Although in general girls who are already in school are likely to leave *once they are married*, a lack of access to schools in the first place can also prompt early marriage, with the intent of protecting a girl's honour or to keep her busy. The direction of causation is difficult to disentangle, but is likely very context-dependent. But what is clear is that lack of access to education, be it for financial, geographic or other reasons, may lead to higher rates of child marriage, in part due to lack of knowledge of the harms associated with it. Other structural factors, such as low educational attainment, poor transportation to markets, social isolation and lack of security, can lead to lower earning opportunities for both girls and other family members, and thus more economic pressure to marry.

4. Effective Programme Interventions

This section highlights areas where interventions are common and appear to have been successful as well as areas where there have been theoretical or potential effects on child marriage, but few evaluated or on-going programmes. Due to space considerations, this section does not address every intervention, but includes references to a few initiatives that represent the theory of change and are thus emblematic of programmes in South Asia.

Evidence from systematic reviews

A series of systematic reviews of evaluated programs around the world reveal important lessons in how to design effective interventions to reduce child marriage (Lee-Rife et al. 2012, Malhotra et al. 2011, Kalamar et al. 2016). While there is a dearth of evaluated programs, these reviews demonstrate that the following strategies were effective at reducing child marriage rates, or at raising the average age of marriage (1) empower girls with information, skills and social networks and (2) provide economic incentives, especially for education.

Programme structure is important to success. The "horizontal" programme approach, in which a programme employs multiple levers of change, appears more successful in achieving sustained impact, though complexity can make implementation and evaluation difficult and costly. The opposite would be the "vertical" programme approach, which focuses on key structural drivers, such as access to education or poverty. Lack of community engagement and lack of a focus on changing norms may undermine sustainability of this second approach.

Empowering girls with information, skills, and support networks

Life skills, education, training on livelihoods, and empowerment of girls

A large proportion of existing and on-going initiatives to combat child marriage focus on empowering girls. These programmes include girls' clubs, both for girls in and out of school, formal and informal job and skills training, initiatives to keep girls in school, general life skills training, and more. BALIKA, in Bangladesh, is one of the largest of such programmes and was evaluated via a randomised, controlled trial (RCT), to differentiate between education, skills training and empowerment as effective means to combat child marriage (Population Council 2016). Life skills, education and empowerment programmes are often implemented in combination with each other, with various strategies targeted to girls in and out of school, and married or still unmarried. They aim to empower girls to make informed decisions, and provide them with skills that can be transferred between home and the workplace.

Health interventions

A number of health interventions targeting adolescents have either explicit goals around reducing child marriage, or have recorded changes in child marriage rates or average age of marriage in tandem with other behaviours. A number of these interventions have found that lack of sexual and reproductive health services is often a factor, while a lack of sanitation facilities and products can lead to missed days at school and ultimately dropout, which may prompt early marriage (Adukia 2014).

Programmes providing education on sexual and reproductive health often also include elements promoting empowerment of girls to make their own decisions about their marriage, sexuality, and childbearing.

Emergency services and helplines

Related to health interventions, providing counselling, emergency, and help services for children is an emerging area for child marriage interventions. Initiatives such as the Youth Health-line in Afghanistan,

or Snap Counsellors in India, offer girls a safe and confidential way to provide information on sexual and reproductive health and healthy relationships to adolescents (UNFPA and UNICEF 2016; Borges 2016). These and other similar programmes do not specifically focus on child marriage, but have the potential to help to address and/or reduce the practice. Snap counsellors in particular make use of social media and growing cell phone access to reach girls who may not have access to information about violence and sexual and reproductive health.

Targeting parents and community members: education, mobilization and economic support

Conditional and unconditional cash transfers

A renewed focus on cash transfers in development, especially to the very poor, has potential to be applied in child marriage work, though existing interventions have shown mixed effects. Cash transfers have been evaluated in a few circumstances and have been around for some time. Cash transfers directly address structural and economic factors associated with child marriage by providing support for education and nutrition. Although there are only a few programmes that directly aim to reduce child marriage rates or delay age at marriage through cash transfers, more and more programmes have had an indirect impact. Programmes that included cash transfers that were designated as school funds in Pakistan (Punjabi Female School Stipend Program), Ethiopia (Berhane Hewan), and Malawi (Zomba) show promise (Hinds, 2015). India's *Apni Beti Apna Dhan* directly linked transfers to staying unmarried until age 18 and showed declines in child marriage among treatment groups (Malhotra et al. 2011).

Less is known about *unconditional* cash transfers and their potential to affect child marriage, however, and the few programmes that do exist have not been rigorously evaluated. More research is needed to identify how to structure cash transfers to alter behaviours and norms that support child marriage, including: on scheduling payments throughout a girl's life or education cycle: on how many payments should be scheduled: and on whether or not they should be conditional or unconditional.
In addition, more work is needed to understand *framing* of the transfers to ensure that payments are not seen as governments or NGOs supporting dowry payments or to defray the costs of marriage.

Finally, more work is needed on how communities react when payments are no longer available. In India, for example, UNFPA's *Dhanalakshmi* conditional cash transfer scheme showed no change in the perceived norms around marriage, despite declines in the rates of marriage itself. A policy brief on this study thus cautions that financial incentives should be de-linked from marriage, but the disconnect between norms and behaviour also suggests that if cash transfers are discontinued, rates of child marriage may rise again, either alone or in the face of economic shocks (UNFPA 2015).

Working with parents, men, and boys

Children are not able to freely and fully consent to marriage, both because they are children and because they may be pressured or coerced. More often than not, parents of both girls and boys are deciding when and to whom a child gets married, so initiatives targeting parents have potential. Some of these initiatives have focused on awareness raising on the harms of child marriage, targeting parents, men, and boys, in hopes of changing social norms and behaviours.

Addressing the "demand side" of the marriage market means focusing on the incentives for parents, men, and boys, to marry off, or marry, a child bride. Interventions often revolve around changing community social norms, and the challenge is to take them to scale. In Nepal, for example, the Choices, Voices, and Promises Program engages boys directly and encourages discussion between boys and girls to promote new social norms (Save the Children 2011). Rigorous evaluation of such programmes is necessary to determine their efficacy in combating child marriage.

Like girls, child grooms are rarely making the decision to marry for themselves, either, and few services target them directly. In some cases, as in when boys are earning money or when there is a strong belief in higher future earnings that will be used to support the family, boys *may* have some say, but there are still no programmes working with child grooms and even less is known about the effects of marriage on them. Few services target them directly, either before or after marriage. A few programmes, such as UNICEF's Improving Adolescent Lives in South Asia, target boys' professed understanding of the law and associated harms, but it is not clear if they are affecting marriage rates in general. Save the Children's work in Bangladesh does target men and boys' understanding of sexual and reproductive health, and encourages men to take joint responsibility for family planning (Save the Children 2011).

Work with faith-based organizations

The role of faith-based organizations in development in general, and in combating child marriage in particular, is still relatively unexplored and remains a key gap area (Karam 2015). The role of faith-based organizations in combating child marriage links social norms change theory and implementation of legal frameworks. Engaging religious leaders to promote desirable norms of marriage (e.g., where both parties consent and are over 18) could lead to lower child marriage rates. USAID's Let Girls Learn programme, GHR Foundation's efforts to empower leaders of all faiths to increase child protection, and World Vision International's gender task forces are empowerment programmes implemented in conjunction with faith-based organizations. These programmes show promise, but few appear to have been rigorously evaluated.

Enhancing the access to, and quality of, formal schooling and health services

While programmatic interventions focus on alternative or accelerated learning and alternative health services for girls in and out of school, more work is needed to improve formal schooling and health services for all children. India recently achieved universal primary education for both boys and girls, in 2015 (UNESCO 2014). Bangladesh is not far behind, at 99% net enrolment rate; Pakistan is at 70% and Sri Lanka is at 96% (World Bank 2013). Gender parity in schooling and rising primary enrolment rates are promising, but increasing education access and completion remains critical to changing child marriage rates.

Further expanding secondary school access may have an even greater effect on child marriage. Children who leave school are more likely to become married; in some communities in Nepal, unmarried out-of-school boys are seen as idle (CARE 2016), and leaving school for girls often happens alongside puberty, which can signal readiness for marriage in some cultures.

Yet research shows that girls who complete secondary education are more likely to remain unmarried at least until 18, thus expanding access to this level of education may help to reduce child marriage directly by keeping children in school (Murphy and Carr 2009; Plan Asia 2013). Expanding secondary school access for all children, meanwhile, may also alleviate larger economic and structural drivers of child marriage, including poverty, lack of knowledge of alternatives and access to well-paying jobs.

Creating an enabling environment

Legal interventions

Legal interventions to reduce child marriage have traditionally included only policy advocacy to criminalize "early marriage." Most countries have laws establishing 18 as the age of marriage, but these laws are often ineffective. In many countries, girls and boys under 18 can be married off with parental permission, and determining a child's true age can be difficult (WHO 2016).

Potentially effective interventions in this arena have included the emerging areas of marriage and birth registration, which could help to delay age at marriage by providing a confirmation of the age of

the proposed partners. Birth and marriage registrations could also provide an opportunity to identify girls who are already married and offer them services, a key gap area.

Changing the norms that facilitate child marriage

Interventions to change social norms aim to change individuals' perceptions of the acceptability or frequency of a practice or belief. These programmes often come in the form of "edutainment,"", where messages are broadcast through characters that the target audience can relate to in film, television, comic books, and movies.

One of the most visible social norms programmes, *Berhane Hewan*, is currently being evaluated using a randomized control trial (RCT). In East Africa, *Berhane Hewan* seeks social norms change through public celebrations, but also addresses other drivers (Erulkar and Muthengi 2009). In South Asia, the Meena Communication Initiative, a set of comic books and films that seek to reduce gender inequality and discrimination against girls, is a good example of such a program, though it has not been rigorously evaluated (Cooper and Fletcher 2013).

5. Measurement and Evaluation

From the mapping exercise and a review of the literature, it becomes apparent that very few interventions on child marriage have been evaluated, with little evidence on the most effective and appropriate ways to end the practice. A stronger evidence base is thus needed in order to appropriately identify and implement strategies. However, the lack of rigorously evaluated programmes is also an opportunity to ask what constitutes evidence, and what constitutes *the best* evidence? This section reviews some popular evaluation methods and highlights potentially high-impact evaluation strategies.

Data availability and collection

Before evaluation can take place there must be a good foundation of quality data on inputs and outcomes for programmes to end child marriage. Many organizations have begun to invest more time in collecting these programmatic-level data.

There are also larger-scale datasets, that could show national level change, but these have their drawbacks. First, many of these national-level surveys are collected only every 5 or 10 years, which is too infrequent to reveal short-term change in important metrics.

And whatever the frequency or scale, existing datasets might not measure important outcomes well. They could be wholly excluded, such as norms, or have known issues with underreporting, on child marriage itself or on domestic violence, for example (Ellsberg, et al. 2011).

As with measurement, there is a trade-off in collecting more or more frequent data in that funds are not being spent on direct services or interventions. However, there is a need to ensure that services are being effectively implemented and programs are meeting their goals, which cannot be accomplished without adequate reliable data.

Impact evaluation

RCTs are considered the "gold standard" for evaluating programmatic and policy interventions (Gertler et al. 2011). However, their focus on discerning what works, and the limitations of a "point-in-time" estimate of impact, may also obscure the effects of multi-sectoral interventions or interventions whose progress builds over time. The RCT method is also expensive and, in the short term, quite rigid, requiring longer-term (one to two years or more) adherence to an intervention method (Gertler et al. 2011). It thus may not allow for rapid changes in practice due to learning in the field.

Alternatives to RCTs that fall under the heading of impact evaluation, such as regression discontinuity design, pre- and post-evaluation, propensity score matching, and other experimental and quasi-experimental methods, are rigorous to varying degrees and are widely practiced by academics. However, the technical expertise required to perform these evaluations can present a significant hurdle for organizations or governments interested in measuring impact, but who lack the statistical knowledge or resources often found in universities or other academic institutions.

Alternatives to impact evaluation

There are also "evaluative" methodologies that rely on a similar approach to evaluation but are less costly than RCTs (Scriven 2008). Also required are evaluation methods that are flexible and allow for consideration of multiple actors working on the same problems. The statistical justification for the causal effects measured by RCTs is based on a broad and deep understanding of context, systems, demographics, and other sample-level characteristics. Alternative methods of evaluation include these same types of questions, but are designed somewhat differently. A few examples include: measuring collective impact; outcome mapping; outcome harvesting; participatory data collection; integrated development; and rapid learning. While many competing methods are available and being developed, ultimately the operational context should determine the type of evaluation (Gertler et al. 2011).

For example, "collective impact" involves the actions of many actors including local NGOs, governments, and multilateral organizations, all working toward a common goal. Yet measuring and evaluating collective impact in the area of child marriage involves focusing not on the impact of a single intervention but rather understanding how the efforts of these many coordinating institutions and organizations can make change together. In other words, evaluating collective impact should take into account the effects of the "change-making process as a whole" (Parkhurst and Preskill 2014).

Parkhurst and Preskill (2014) suggest that, in such a complex environment, non-standard methods of evaluation can ensure rigor by "asking why" and ensuring evaluators thinking carefully about confounding factors. But these must be undertaken on a regular basis, as certain important characteristics are subject to rapid and continual disruption and change.

"Integrated development" links design, delivery and evaluation of programs across sectors under the assumption that integration leads to an amplified, longer-lasting impact. Integrated development calls for developing precise performance indicators, monitoring programmes, and process in progress.

Ultimately, evaluation can be undertaken via experimental *or* quasi-experimental methods, but in the case where complex, integrated programmes are in place, a broader view is necessary. Understanding whether planned effects were realized, to what extent these are due to integration, and whether integration resulted in unanticipated effects is key (FHI360 2016).

6. Goals for the Meeting and Summary of Key Questions

The Expert Group Meeting on Ending Child Marriage examined promising interventions and assessed the state of child marriage in South Asia. Building on the mapping of child marriage interventions in South Asia conducted in 2015, the meeting convened experts, together with staff from UNICEF and UNFPA regional and country offices. The meeting aimed to examine selected promising interventions, with a focus on *why* they are working.

In select cases, the EGM also examined interventions that have been less successful or that have had unintended consequences. The EGM aimed to build a better understanding of what enables interventions to succeed as well as to identify key barriers that prevent or impede effective change. Finally, the EGM had the goal to develop a shared understanding of appropriate methodologies for measuring change and impact, and to identify key priorities for additional research on child marriage.

Presentations and notes from discussions have been compiled into a short report, accompanied by a compendium of papers and presentations, and by this paper. The report includes a discussion of successful, evidence-based strategies and interventions to address and reduce child marriage in South Asia, particularly in high prevalence regions, suggested methodologies and approaches for monitoring, for evaluating and for assessing impact of programmes and interventions to address child marriage, with recommendations for future research.

The EGM programme addressed many of the topics described above, but did not cover every topic of interest in depth. For instance, key gap areas in child marriage research, how and when interventions fail, and child marriage in conflict are mentioned in this background paper, but were not formally presented at the meetings. Thus, a set of guiding key questions for the meeting was offered below to help draw out these issues in discussion.

Key questions

- What are key emerging issues and findings from new research on factors and drivers for child marriage in South Asia?

- What are examples of successful interventions in the following domains?
    - Creating capacity for choice (empowering girls; mobilizing parents, communities, boys, and men; providing quality adolescent services)
    - Providing alternatives to child marriage (alternative/accelerated learning; material support or incentives; livelihoods)
    - Creating legal and policy structures that enable and support change (legal and policy changes; protective services and support)

- What are examples of interventions in emerging areas?
    - Economic drivers of child marriage
    - Child marriage as a result of shocks
    - Child marriage in conflict

- What research and evaluation methods should we be using to assess interventions?
    - How can we measure multi-level interventions and collective impact?

- What happens when interventions fail or are less successful than anticipated?
    - How can we ensure that we learn from these experiences?
    - How can we mitigate harm to beneficiaries from programmatic failure?

- What are key areas for future research and evaluation to build the evidence base for successful programmes and interventions?
    - What are key gap areas for future research?
        - Engaging grooms/demand side of marriage market
        - Marriage and birth registration
        - Services and support for married girls

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