

ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF CHILD MARRIAGE: ISSUES OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS)

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated economic impacts of child marriage as direct violation of the issues of sustainable development goals (SDGs). The specific objectives of this study were: participation and decision-making, educational attainment, labour force participation, violence, and health. It also looked at the existing link between child marriage and SDGs. This study used desk review methodology to review existing published and grey literature. Simple inclusion criteria for the search created a comprehensive list of data sources, including data from peer-reviewed journals, grey literature and other sources. Most documents included in this review consisted of grey literature publications such as reports by United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Population Council, Human Rights Watch, Girls Not Brides, Equality Now, Plan International, the World Bank and International Center for Research on Women (ICRW). The following key search terms were included: child marriage; early marriage; forced marriage; child brides; girls' decision making; sustainable development goals (SDGs); education attainment; work labour participation; health knowledge; violence against girls; age at first marriage. The search then prioritized the inclusion of documents that provided detail on programming and policy efforts to address child marriage, and noted key documents that provide insight into the prevalence, risk factors, and consequences of the practice. The study findings revealed that child marriage directly hinders the achievement of the sustainable development goals (SDGs). It exposes them to violence throughout their lives and traps them in a cycle of poverty. It is recommended that ending child marriage requires an integrated and coordinated approach involving Government, International Partners and local Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). This study concludes that with the full commitment of governments, development practitioners, civil societies, communities, families and girls themselves, a world without child marriage can become a reality.

Keywords: child marriage, economic cost, early childbirths, education, health, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Child marriage is a serious human rights violation and one of the most pressing development concerns in the world today. Commonly defined in international law as marriage under the age of 18, child marriage disproportionately and negatively affects girls who are more likely to be married as children than boys United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF, 2014). Child marriage compromises girls' dignity as they are often forced in to marriage usually at a very early age when they

do not have the maturity or are not given the freedom to consent to marriage (UNICEF, 2014). It is steeped in harmful traditional norms and practices passed across generations, which has a debilitating impact on the lives of girls, their families and society at large, and perpetuates a generational cycle of poverty. According to UNICEF (2014), apart from being a human rights violation, child marriage has grave consequences for girls' sexual and reproductive health and often results in early pregnancies with increased risks for young mothers and their children. Child marriage also denies girls their childhood and crucial education and employment opportunities. It makes them vulnerable to sexual and other forms of physical violence and abuse in the domestic setting. Despite these adverse consequences, the practice persists with impunity.

This is a matter of grave concern and it requires serious deliberation and action. As a result, in recent years, child marriage has received great attention on international and national development agendas. The United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted in September 2015, include eliminating child marriage as a key target for advancing gender equality by 2030 (UNICEF, 2015). In line with SDGs, no society can afford the lost opportunity, waste of talent, or personal exploitation that child marriage causes. This goal may help sustain international attention and enhance political will at the national level in states with a high prevalence of child marriage (UNICEF, 2015).

That is why this study was carried out to show what the evidence tells us about this harmful practice and to assist decision makers sharpen their focus on the urgent protection of girls' human rights. Respect for girls' human rights requires that we prevent and end child marriage and demands that we actively support girls who are already married. This study used desk review of literature available on the subject of child marriage globally, but focusing mainly on Africa, where rates of child marriage are said to be highest.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Child marriage is a socially established practice that has been carried on from generation to generation, and is by no means a new phenomenon. As girls are predominantly affected by child marriage and other variables associated with gender inequalities and social injustices, women form the largest percentage of the world's poor. Child marriage is largely a phenomenon of girls, which has created a critical and significant experience for many young girls in Sub-Saharan African countries. Married young girls who come from poorer families have lower levels of education compared with girls who married after adolescence. In addition, the younger the bride, the wider the age difference between herself and her spouse, and this exposes many girls to marital violence and poor decision making. Child marriage, therefore, confers upon girls a different set of expectations, pressures, and risks. The marriage of a young girl not only affects her life but that of the children she will bear. Child marriage is therefore a violation of human rights for females. A girl who is married as a child is basically robbed of her education, good health, and long-term prospects. Furthermore, there is also an impediment of self-development in many aspects of a girl's future career opportunities. The high prevalence of child marriage is practically influenced by different local cultures and traditions in countries and societies. However, the consequences are basically universal and the same. In addition, the process of addressing and controlling child marriage practices has proved sluggish because they are often linked with the economic and social needs of struggling families and societies (UNICEF, 2015). It is against this background that this study

investigated economic impacts of child marriage poses to global development. Elimination of child marriage is one of the specific targets for achieving goal number five of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals, which focuses on gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study was to investigate economic impacts of child marriage by documenting what was known about the economic impacts of child marriage on the girls who marry early, their children, and their families. The specific objectives of the study were:

1. To investigate participation and decision-making of girls in child marriage and corresponding targets related to this;
2. To explore child marriage's effects on education attainment of the girls and cross-cutting targets related to it;
3. To determine levels of girls' education on health knowledge and advance highlight SDGs' health-related targets
4. To establish impact of child marriage on girls' labour force participation and corresponding targets related to this;
5. To examine child marriage as a violence against girls, including priorities and strategies for achieving and measuring progress on the child marriage-related SDGs at national and regional levels.

1.3 Methodology

The researcher reviewed multiple databases to identify relevant academic publications, journal articles, programme evaluations, survey data, and other influential sources. The following key search terms were included: child marriage; early marriage; forced marriage; child brides; girls' decision making; sustainable development goals (SDGs); education attainment; work labour participation; health knowledge; violence against girls; age at first marriage. The search then prioritized the inclusion of documents that provided detail on programming and policy efforts to address child marriage, and noted key documents that provide insight into the prevalence, risk factors, and consequences of the practice.

Simple inclusion criteria for the search created a comprehensive list of data sources, including data from peer-reviewed journals, grey literature and other sources. Most documents included in this review consisted of grey literature publications such as reports by United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Population Council, Human Rights Watch, Girls Not Brides, Equality Now, Plan International, the World Bank and International Center for Research on Women (ICRW).

In synthesising secondary quantitative data for the desk review, initial priority was given to each country's Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) and Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey (MICS) data, where available. Since both surveys collect nationally representative data at regular intervals, with standardised questions used in all surveys, together they provide an ideal platform for cross-national and regional comparisons. The quantitative analysis focused on assessing the prevalence of child marriage, adolescent girls' use of modern contraceptives, early pregnancy and childbearing, and violence. For the

purpose of this analysis, data were extracted according to different age brackets, with a primary focus on women in the 20-24 years age group married before age 18, which is the global standard indicator for child marriage. Summary statistics also included women who were married before age 15 to show greater detail on the patterns of child marriage in each country. In the absence of DHS data on the prevalence of child marriage, data from UNICEF's Child Protection Baseline Survey was used. To meet the objectives of this study, the major findings of the desk review are included in this study to complement the qualitative analysis and strengthen the regional recommendations.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Child Marriage in Global Context

The incidence of child marriage varies by global location. Most often, available data to provide adequate information on the occurrence of child marriage are outdated. Therefore, it is very difficult to analyse the true extent of child marriage across the world. In rural areas of different countries, child marriages may not be officially registered, and at times, parents also falsify girls' ages (Parsons et al., 2015). However, some data exist. Approximately 10 million child marriages occur every year. Globally, nearly 1 in 3 girls are married before they turn 18 years and 1 in 7 are married before the age of 15 (UNICEF, 2016). Similarly, in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, the practice of marrying girls at younger age is very common International Center for Research on Women (ICRW, 2013). The main problem that centres on child marriage, however, is focused on economical or financial status. This is the reason why the practices of child marriage are common in many rural developing societies in Asia and Africa (World Bank, 2012).

According to research by UNICEF (2001), the age of child brides varied with respect to countries where the marriages took place, as well as traditions and beliefs practiced. He further stated that almost 50% of girls from Sub-Saharan Africa were married by the time they turned 18. In some communities in Ghana, there is a betrothal of girls even before they are born (Alhassan, 2013). Child marriage is also widely and commonly practiced in Southern Asia. In the UNICEF's report breakdown, Bangladesh recorded 65 %, Nepal 57 %, Afghanistan 54 %, and India almost 50 %. Furthermore, Southern Asia recorded a high percentage of child marriage among ethnic groups where Islamic religion was widely practiced (UNICEF, 2014). Child marriages in Africa were highly recorded in the Central and Western as compared to the Northern and Eastern parts. Generally, about 40 % and 49 % of girls under 19 were married in Central and West Africa respectively, compared to 27 % in East and 20 % in North and South Africa (United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), 2012). A study by Adedokun, Gbemiga and Cholli (2011) showed that, in Nigeria, the practice of child marriage was deeply rooted in culture and religion. With an estimation of 42 %, Nigeria recorded one of the highest rates of such marriage practices in the world. They added that child marriage is highly prevalent in regions where Islamic religion is practiced.

2.2 Reasons for Early Marriages (Global)

According to a report by ICRW (2013), opportunities available to women, traditional beliefs, and familial economic situation or status were the structural factors that influenced the occurrences of child marriages, especially in developing countries. The report pointed out that traditional causes of child

marriage are deeply rooted in social values and norms. Further, it observed that although many factors have contributed to the increases in child marriage in the past and recent times, the aforementioned factors influence the acceptance of this negative practice.

2.3 Negative impacts of child marriage

The practices of child marriage as a violation of fundamental human rights obviously undermine global developmental efforts. Child marriage as a global problem affects the achievement of more educated, healthier, and stable populations (UNFPA, 2012). Child marriage practices in many traditions and cultures signify the complacency and discrimination that face women and girls. The practice negatively involves the discontinuance of education, separation of the child-bride from peers, early sexual activity and child bearing, as well as domestic violence, all of which are associated with health complications (Birech, 2013). As a social necessity packaged in culture, child marriage amounts to the exploitation and abuse of women and girls (Wodon, 2015).

Child marriage practices have been identified and condemned as they contribute to the slow pace of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The elimination of child marriage is one of the targets for achieving United Nations Sustainable Development Goal number five, which focuses on gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls (Smith and Haddad, 2015). Its inclusion on the SDGs highlights the continuing importance of child marriage as a development issue and also ensures that the prevalence of child marriage (Malhotra et al. 2011) will continue to be measured through 2030 and beyond. Child marriage drives lack of equal participation and voice both in the household and the wider community and further contributes to diminished self-esteem, poor health and, in some cases, suicides in women (Nour, 2006). The consequences of child marriage practices revealed wider detrimental results than just the impact on the individual children affected as discussed below:

2.4 Participation and Decision-Making impacts of child marriage

Choosing when and who to marry is one of life's most important decisions (Somerset, 2000). No one else, however well-meaning, has the right to make that decision. The decision to marry should be a freely made, informed decision that is taken without fear, coercion, or undue pressure (Warner, Stoebenau and Glinski (2014). It is an adult decision and a decision that should be made, when ready, as an adult. On that virtually all countries agree. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), both human rights instruments, outlaw child marriage (UNICEF, 2014). The International Conference on Population and Development in 1994 (ICPD) called on countries to eliminate child marriage and to enforce laws that ensure free and full consent (UNICEF, 2016).

Marriages especially in rural areas are characterised by parents making a decision on behalf of their children for who to marry, and when to marry (Somerset, 2000). Thus mostly conducted without the valid consent of one or both parties and are marriages in which duress whether physical or emotional is

a factor. It is generally believed that any child marriage constitutes a forced marriage, in recognition that even if a child appears to give their consent, anyone under the age of 18 is not able to make a fully informed choice whether or not to marry (Grown, Gupta, and Kes, 2005).

According to a UNFPA report (2016), international conventions declare that child marriage is a violation of human rights because it denies girls the right to decide when and with whom to marry. For example, in Uganda and other African countries, parents, family and community leaders typically plan adolescents' marital relationships, leaving young people from traditional families without autonomy in this decision (UNICEF, 2005). Child marriage becomes a business transaction between families that regulates and commodifies girls' and women's sexuality and reproduction. In Zambia, despite having established 21 as the minimum legal age of marriage for boys and girls, they can marry at 16 with parental consent. The law is further hindered by inconsistencies with other laws and policies on children, and by the existence of a customary legal system that allows girls to be married as soon as they have reached puberty (UNFPA, 2013). Once married off without their consents (UNFPA, 2013), child brides often experience overlapping vulnerabilities: they are young, often poor, and undereducated. This affects the resources and assets they can bring into their marital household, thus reducing their decision-making ability (Population Council, 2007).. Therefore, child marriage places a girl under the control of her husband and often in-laws, limiting her ability to voice her opinions and form and pursue her own plans and aspirations. All in all, girls who are married as children are less empowered, have little decision-making power within their households and communities and are less likely to participate fully in society (Parsons, J. et al., 2015) Parsons, J. et al., 2015.

2.5 Educational Attainment impacts of child marriage

Educational attainment is also gendered (Nguyen and Wodon, 2015). When girls are married early, their educational trajectory is altered. Formal schooling and education often cease, which means they stop acquiring knowledge and skills that would carry them through life, including as productive members of their households and communities (Lloyd and Mensch, 2008). Likewise, national data analysed by the Population Council in 2007 indicated that 68 per cent of girls who married did not complete primary school, and approximately 60 per cent were unable to read or write (Population Council, 2007). Child marriage thus denies many girls the well-established benefits of schooling, such as improved economic prospects and better health status.

For many girls, school is not only a source of formal and informal education, but also a space for them to develop social skills and networks and build support systems, which allows them to be mobile and engaged in community affairs and activities (Parsons et al., 2015). Girls who are married early are often removed from these supportive social networks and isolated in the marital home (Plan International 2012). In addition, withdrawing from school lessens girls' ability to engage in community and national-level discussions and debates, or engage in the political processes (Nguyen and Wodon, 2012). Girls whose mothers have had no education are more likely to be married early, contributing to the cycle of poverty in subsequent generations (Alhassan, 2013).

Child marriage may also have negative effects on the next generation and on the future economic development of the African continent (Duvvury et al. 2013). The children of young mothers with little

or no education are less likely to survive infancy, to have a good start to their education, to do well in school, or to continue beyond minimum levels of education. Daughters of uneducated mothers are especially likely to drop out of school, marry young and repeat the cycle of poverty (Lloyd and Mensch, 2008).

A study conducted in Mozambique found that 67 percent of women aged 20 to 24 with no education and 57 percent with primary education were married or in union at the age of 18, compared to only 12 percent of women with secondary education or higher (Plan International, 2012). Further, mothers who are illiterate are less likely to be knowledgeable about proper health and nutrition for themselves and their children than better educated mothers. Nguyen and Wodon (2012) observed that girls' education is capable of reducing the spread of HIV/AIDS. Thus, educating a girl protects both herself against getting infected and her children. Studies report that women with post-primary education are five times more likely than illiterate women to be knowledgeable about how to prevent HIV/AIDS (Nour, 2006). In addition, children of educated mothers have higher rates of immunisation and overall survival, as well as lower rates of stunting and wasting. Therefore, education is one of the most powerful tools available to prevent and respond to child marriage. Girls who are in school are not only protected in many cases from child marriage, but gain the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed throughout their lives (Grown, Gupta and Kes. 2005). This is line with Goal 1 of the sustainable development goals that supporting girls to avoid child marriage, to stay in school, and to delay having children translates into greater opportunities for them to develop new skills and generate income, building an economic base that will help lift future generations out of poverty.

2.6 Labour Force Participation impacts of child marriage

Child marriage may influence female labour force participation in a number of ways, including through a reduction in expected returns from participation in paid employment due to lower educational attainment and an increase in the relative value of unpaid household work stemming from higher lifetime fertility (Cameron, Dowling and Worswick. 2001). A lack of engagement in the labour force may have long-term implications not only for women and their families, but in addition at the aggregate level it may significantly reduce economic growth in communities or societies (Klasen and Pieters. 2012). Low education is a barrier to entry into formal, paid employment [25]. Secondary and post-secondary education is strongly associated with labour force participation (UNICEF, 2016), but most girls who marry early do not reach that level. Further, young married girls whose schooling is cut short also lack the knowledge base and the marketable skills needed for formal work, and are confined to informal or home-based type work, typically characterised by inferior working conditions and lower (or nonexistent) incomes (UNICEF, 2016), .

Child marriage may also reduce labour force participation by significantly increasing the barriers to employment posed by fertility and women's reproductive roles, both of which are closely linked to age at first marriage. Child marriage is associated with early childbearing, short birth spacing, and higher number of children (Malhotra et al. 2011). Large family size and women's roles as primary caregivers for their children emerge as having negative effects on labour force participation decisions, particularly where there are no or limited childcare options (UNFPA. 2012). Since these barriers are particularly felt during the early stages of marriage and family formation, child marriage has the effect of delaying

potential entry into the labour force, stunting the potential professional growth and further reducing competitiveness in the marketplace (Smith and Haddad, 2015). Furthermore, the traditional gender norms that typically accompany child marriage, coupled with relatively low returns to participation in the formal workforce, lower the opportunity cost of not working for women and their households, further reducing the likelihood of participation (Birech, 2013). These factors, in turn, may have significant intergenerational impacts, leading to poorer health among children and lower levels of investment in education and other forms of human capital accumulation, as well as a reduced ability to address shocks such as illness, all of which increase the likelihood of child marriage in subsequent generations (UNICEF, 2005).

2.7 Violence impacts of child marriage

Child marriage itself can be considered a form of violence against girls (Amin, 2014). Gender norms that devalue girls and women and drive the practice of child marriage may also promote the acceptability of violence. Many girls are married off by their families with the intention of protecting the girl from violence and sexual harassment (Duvvury et al. 2013). In reality, protection from violence is not guaranteed, and physical and sexual violence is often experienced at the hands of the husband once the marriage has occurred (Plan UK, 2011). For example, as it was described in the *Zambia Daily Mail*: “My father used poverty as an excuse to marry me off. He thought that by doing so he would be reducing on the burden of taking care of the family. Little did he know that he was subjecting me to a life of violence,” laments 19-year-old Rebecca Mundia (not real name) (*Zambia Daily Mail*, 2015) Thus, there are many unintended consequences caused by desperate parents.

Child marriage is associated with increased exposure to sexual and gender-based violence because the marital relationship is based on the power of one spouse over the other. Young wives are vulnerable to domestic violence, abuse, divorce, and abandonment (ICRW, 2006). Therefore, women who marry young are more likely to be beaten or threatened, and to believe that their husbands might be justified in beating or raping them.

A study from Egypt reports that nearly 30% of married women who entered marriage as child brides become victims of violence at their husbands’ hands, and 41% of women married as child brides are report beatings during pregnancy (Koons Family Institute, 2013). Child brides also suffer emotional violence in their homes and experience severe isolation and depression as a result of child marriage (Le Strat, Dubertret and Le Foll. 2011). Indeed, girls who are married early are at a higher risk of experiencing intimate partner violence (IPV) than girls married after age 18 (Wodon, 2015)..

Investments in ending violence against children and gender-based violence can thus be leveraged to achieve goals in ending child marriage, and vice versa (Duvvury et al. 2013). Ending child marriage also requires implementation of strong legal frameworks which set the minimum age of marriage at 18 and protect girls’ rights (Plan International, 2012). The continued lack of implementation of minimum age of marriage laws effectively undermines the rule of law. By supporting programmes which address child marriage, and ensuring implementation of legislation which establishes a minimum age of

marriage, governments can address a widespread and systematic violation of the rule of law in their countries (ICRW, 2006; UNICEF, 2014).

2.8 Health impacts of child marriage

Many young girls develop and are exposed to reproductive health risks and complications such as obstetric fistula, infant and maternal death as a result of early pregnancies and multiple births (Nguyen and Wodon, 2015). Obstetric fistula is the leakage of urine and feces without control, usually caused by prolonged maternal labour due to physical immaturity for pregnancy (Nour, 2006; Svanemyr et al., 2015). Surprisingly, in some African cultures, long maternal labour is considered natural and mothers are encouraged to bear its pain. Women in particular from poor rural areas may not know when to seek the needed help to avoid delays or prolonged maternal labour (Raj, 2010). As a result, obstetric fistula occurs when the pressure of the baby's head kills soft tissue around the pelvis. Many girls after developing fistula are abandoned by their husbands and also suffer emotional consequences. Early pregnancies create high risk for girls and affect their ability to perform their normal economic and social activities in order to develop their sense of worth (UNFPA, 2012). Girls who are affected become a burden to their families and societies in general (Le Strat, Dubertret and Le Foll, 2011).

Furthermore, the rate of sexual exposure and frequency of unprotected sex within the marital boundary for young girls is high. A study by Clark (2004) stated that about 50 % of unprotected sex occurs among married adolescent girls. Not only does unprotected sexual activity put girls' lives and health in jeopardy, but pregnancy and childbearing project many negative health complications. The study adds that risk of death following pregnancy for girls between 10 and 19 years is higher than those between the ages above 20 years. Girls also face a higher risk of anemia that could lead to death in childbirth (Clark, 2004). Another research in Kisumu in Kenya and Ndola in Zambia indicates that some groups of married adolescent girls had higher rates of HIV infection compared with their unmarried but sexually active counterparts (Clark, 2004).

Child marriage can affect a girl's physical and mental well-being in a number of ways, some of which have been highlighted in previous sections. Girls who are married young experience higher rates of malnutrition, isolation, and depression (Smith and Haddad, 2015), and higher maternal mortality and morbidity than girls who marry after age 18, in part due to IPV (Amin, 2014). These health outcomes result in increased immediate out-of-pocket expenses for the girl and her household, as well as lasting effects on household earnings and reduced productivity (UNFPA, 2013). Intergenerational effects are seen in her children, who may have poor physical health outcomes and poor nutrition status, and experience higher rates of infant mortality (UNICEF, 2016).

Resisting sexual intercourse is not an option in most child marriages, where consummation is considered traditionally the male's right (UNICEF, 2005; UNFPA, 2013). Unwillingness to cooperate is generally ignored. Forced sex causes skin and tissue damage that makes a girl more susceptible to contracting sexually transmitted infections from her husband. A girl has little or no say in protecting herself against pregnancy or diseases, although her husband may be sexually active outside the marriage (Clark, 2004; Raj, 2010).

2.9 Child Marriage and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

All the negative impacts of child marriage discussed in the sections above are perpetuating vicious cycles of poverty, inequality and insecurity which sustain the practice and act as an obstacle to global development (UNICEF, 2014). Child marriage is a global problem that cuts across countries, cultures, religions and ethnicities. It exists in every region around the world, from Africa to Asia, the Middle East to Latin America, and in some communities in Europe and North America (UNFPA, 2012). If there is no reduction in child marriage, the global number of women married as children will reach 1.2 billion by 2050 (UNICEF, 2015). This lack of attention to child marriage undermines the achievement of eight of the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) between 2015 and 2030 (United Nations, 2015). Through review of literature on child marriage, it clear that child marriage is a core development and human rights issue, which hinders the achievement of many other development goals (Grown, Gupta, and Kes, 2005; Smith and Haddad, 2015). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which define global development priorities between now and 2030. Under Goal 5, which focuses on achieving gender equality and empower all women and girls, includes a target 5.3, which advocates for elimination of all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilations (United Nations, 2015). Target 5.3 is critical in terms of garnering action and monitoring progress on reducing child marriage globally. But fully half of the SDGs will not be achieved without significant progress on child marriage, including those related to poverty, health, education, nutrition, food security, economic growth and reduction of inequality, and other manifestations of gender inequality (Duvvury et al. 2013; Smith and Haddad, 2015). Likewise, there are a number of related targets in the SDGs that are not hindered by the existence of child marriage, but achievement of these targets is critical to ending child marriage. Table 1 presents eight Sustainable Development Goals linked to ending child marriage.

Table 1: Eight SDGs Linked to Ending Child Marriage

Sustainable Development Goal	Link to Child Marriage
Goal 1: No poverty	Child marriage is linked to higher household poverty and perpetuates cycles of poverty across generations
Goal 2: Zero hunger	Child brides and their children are more likely to be malnourished
Goal 3: Good health & wellbeing	Child marriage leads to a range of harmful health consequences, including higher rates of maternal and infant mortality and morbidity
Goal 4: Quality education	Child marriage is a barrier to girls' education
Goal 5: Gender equality	Ending child marriage will help achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
Goal 8: Economic growth	Women who marry as children are less likely to participate in workforce, which undermines economic growth, child marriage

	hinders progress towards ending modern forms of slavery and child exploitation
Goal 10: Reduced inequalities	Child marriage affects the poor, rural and disadvantaged populations disproportionately, creates cycles of poverty that reinforce inequality
Goal 16: Peace, justice & strong institutions	By ending child marriage, violence against children would decrease (Target 16.2)

Table 1 shows that child marriage directly hinders the achievement of at least eight (8) of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Child marriage violates girls' rights to health, education and opportunity (UNFPA, 2012). It exposes girls to violence throughout their lives, and traps them in a cycle of poverty (Somerset, 2000; Alhassan, 2013). Although child marriage affects both boys and girls, girls are mostly victims and the most affected. Marrying girls off affects continuation of their education as they would have to leave school to assume their new roles as wives (UNICEF, 2016). Consequently, we will not be able to have gender parity in education nor will we achieve Goal 4: Inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning. Child marriage ensures that more boys will continue to be in school, have an education, attain economic and employable skills while girls are restricted to roles at home and unpaid care work, which reduces their economic independence and traps women in the cycle of poverty (Parsons et al., 2015). This will in turn affect the attainment of Goal 1 focusing on No Poverty, Goal 2: Zero Hunger as well as Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth.

Achieving Goal 5 on Gender Equality will not be possible if we do not stop child marriage. Once the education of a girl is halted at an early stage, this translates into lack of knowledge and access to skills, which means limited or no opportunities in the job market (Nguyen and Wodon, 2015). Thus women, who form the larger population of the world, will have no part or a very small role in economic growth. The growth of communities and countries will be skewed to males only, resulting in a slower pace of development (United Nations, 2015). The progress to "No Poverty" will not be achieved since majority of married girls, who have little or no education will find it difficult to live empowered, poverty-free lives (Warner, Stoebe and Glinski, 2014). As a result, these women will become unproductive and rely on their husbands and governments to fend for their needs and those of their children, a situation that will have dire consequences on the development of communities and the country (UNICEF, 2014). Poverty eradication is possible when people have jobs that give them income so they can cater for their families without over-relying on the government. Women must enjoy equal access to equal opportunities with men for employment (UNICEF, 2016). The girl child is certainly not ready to be a mother as she is still a child. With her reproductive system still maturing, she is likely to be exposed to health risks during and after pregnancy (Nguyen and Wodon, 2015). How then do we make progress on Goal 3: Good Health and Well-Being if we are marrying them off at such early ages? If Africa and its citizens are keen on making progress towards the SDGs, then we must increase our efforts and effectively implement policies that prevent, and reduce child marriage cases as well as punish perpetrators.

2.10 Interventions against child marriage

Due to the harmful effects of child marriage, eliminating it has become a greater priority on the global and national agenda. Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals calls for the eradication of child marriage. In South Asia, 38% of countries have deployed laws banning child marriage and in sub-Saharan Africa, 46% have done so (Pew Research Center, 2016). Still, to be effective, laws and policies need to be coupled with evidence-based programmes/interventions that deliver resources into communities where child marriage remains prevalent. While this study does not focus on policies and interventions that could be implemented to end child marriage and early childbirths, the review of literature provides insights of what may work. In one of the first reviews of interventions aiming to end child marriage, (Malhotra, Warner, McGonagle and Lee-Rife, 2011), identified five types of strategies that can be used to prevent or delay early marriage: (1) Empowering girls with information, skills, and support networks. This approach includes not only life-skills training, livelihoods training, and gender-rights awareness training, but also exposure to future careers, reproductive health training, and social mobilization and group formation by adult female mentors. (2) Educating and mobilizing parents and community members. Community approaches recognize that the elimination of child marriage involves not only the parents and family members of girls, but also the communities in which they live. This approach aims to influence community attitudes toward child marriage and increase local knowledge of the negative consequences of this harmful practice. Community dialogue and street theater are examples of this approach. (3) Enhancing the accessibility and quality of formal schooling for girls. Schooling approaches focus on providing incentives to keep girls in school and for out-of-school girls to return to school. They include the provision of free school supplies and/or uniforms, payment of school fees, and tutoring in mathematics and English. (4) Offering economic support and incentives for girls and their families. Economic approaches involve providing families economic incentives or opportunities to offset the costs of raising girls and to discourage them from marrying girls off. Economic approaches mainly involve cash or asset transfers that are unconditional or conditional on certain conditions being met, such as school attendance; and (5) Fostering an enabling legal and policy framework. Gaps and inconsistencies in the national legal framework should be addressed to ensure that there is a strong and coherent legal framework prohibiting child marriage and gender discrimination. A more recent review by Kalamar et al. (2016) suggests that interventions to promote education, including cash transfers, school vouchers, free school uniforms, reductions in school fees, teacher training, and life skills curricula, are among the most likely to help. In some cases the evidence is mixed, but in many cases such interventions are found to reduce child marriage, or at least increase the age at first marriage.

3.0 MAJOR FINDINGS FROM THE REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Objective 1: Participation and Decision-Making

When girls are married early, they often lack the ability to negotiate sexual activity, contraceptive use, or birth spacing with their husbands (UNFPA, 2013) and in many cases are unable to speak up against the physical or emotional violence they experience at the hands of their husbands or in-laws within their own homes. This lack of power and decision-making autonomy can have a significant influence on economic decisions.

Objective 2: Educational Attainment

The results from review of literature strongly support the promotion of girls' education to not only protect girls from marriage but also provide them with the tools to lead more empowered lives (UNFPA, 2013). Girls who marry as children are less likely to complete secondary education; every year of marriage before the age of 18 reduces the likelihood of girls' secondary school completion by four to six percentage points. Continuing schooling also helps reduce child marriage; each year in secondary school education reduces the risk of child marriage for girls by six percentage points.

Objective 3: Health knowledge

The results showed that child marriage and early childbearing have significant implications. Women married before 18 are likely to have more children, impacting their own health and welfare as well as that of their families. Child brides are also less likely to receive proper medical care during pregnancy and delivery than those who give birth later. The combination of girls being physically immature and the lack of proper medical care during pregnancy and childbirth put adolescent mothers at higher risk for complications during gestation and delivery, including prolonged or obstructed labour, fistula and death. Complications of pregnancy and childbirth are the second leading causes of death among adolescent girls ages 15– 19 globally, with nearly 70,000 dying each year (UNFPA, 2013). More children in a household reduce the ability to pay for food, education and healthcare (UNFPA, 2013).

Objective 4: Girls' labour force participation

Child marriage was identified as having a substantial impact on women's potential earnings and productivity. This is because child marriage curtails education attainment which in turn reduces women's expected earnings in adulthood. It also can curb their influence within the household and limit their bargaining power. By ending child marriage, countries could increase their national earnings on average by 1% (UNFPA, 2013).

Objective 5: Violence against girls

Girls who are married young and are subject to IPV experience higher rates of unintended pregnancy, induced abortion, pregnancy complications, low birth weight of children, and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. IPV also negatively affects girls' mental health, leading to depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Carbone-Lopez, Kruttschnitt and Macmillan 2006).

Therefore, child marriage is an obstacle to the Sustainable Development Goals that universally apply to all. Countries should mobilize efforts to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind.

4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE STUDY

Child marriage drives lack of equal participation and voice both in the household and the wider community and further contributes to diminished self-esteem, poor health and, in some cases, suicides in women. Investment in prevention of child marriage has huge pay-offs for countries and their economies along with supporting the rights of women and girls. Ending child marriage requires an integrated and coordinated approach involving Government, International Partners and local Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). Remaining gaps,

including lack of efforts to target child grooms and their families, were also reported in the review of literature. A multi-partner and multi-sector approach to address child marriage is required to achieve long-term change, along with strengthening of laws and policy, health and other services, shifting social norms and promoting life skills development.

In view of these facts, and based on the findings of this study, the following are the recommendations that Government and other agencies can observe.

1. Governments to bring national legislations in conformity with international treaties

Gaps and inconsistencies in the national legal framework should be addressed by individual governments to ensure that there is a strong and coherent legal framework prohibiting child marriage and gender discrimination. Setting and enforcing a uniform minimum legal age for marriage is necessary to protect girls. However child marriage continues to flourish which means that efforts should focus on law enforcement. Judges and law enforcement agencies need to be trained to identify and prosecute all parties involved in forced child marriages so that the law becomes a deterrent. Penalties should also be increased in countries where they are currently low.

2. Non-Governmental Organisations to raise awareness on child marriage and promote gender equality

Changing people's attitudes and perceptions toward child marriage requires public education and awareness about the dangers of child marriage, the laws in place and more generally about the gender norms and stereotypes that perpetuate this practice. Children, parents, community leaders, including religious leaders, with a focus on boys and men, should be targeted in efforts to change attitudes about the status of girls and women in the community and should be active partners in community mobilisation to challenge child marriage and gender norms rooted in the tradition. Various communication techniques can be used to spread positive messages about gender equality and the value of girls in the society.

3. Governments to enhance safety in public areas

Efforts to eliminate child marriage should go hand in hand with efforts to protect girls from the risk of sexual harassment and rape. For example, safe transport facilities to reach school safely, child friendly spaces, and sensitization of law enforcers and the public about the importance of safety for women and girls can make public areas safer for women and girls.

4. Governments to strengthen registration systems

Improving birth and marriage registration systems is critical for eliminating child marriage. Making registration compulsory will promote marriage at proper age and should go alongside efforts to raise awareness of the importance of registration and to make it accessible for marginalised communities.

5. Governments to invest in girls' education

Providing education especially at the secondary level to girls is a key strategy for eliminating child marriage. States should invest in girls' education by allocating sufficient resources from national and state budgets to ensure quality education for girls. To keep girls in school, parents and girls need greater

assurances about the quality, safety and value of continued education. Making schools safe learning places for girls is critical. Families also need financial incentives to make education affordable, particularly for secondary and tertiary education in which enrolment lags far behind that of primary education.

6. Women Organisations to provide incentives to girls from economically impoverished families

Poor families often consider girls as an economic burden and they want to marry off their daughters as soon as they reach puberty. The combination of poverty and gender-based discriminatory norms and practices, such as the dowry, increase the vulnerability of girls to early marriage. Providing girls with livelihood opportunities can help reduce child marriages. When teenage girls are able to earn money, they have greater control over their futures, more options when it comes to delaying marriage and childbirth, higher status within the family, and improved ability to provide for themselves and their children. Girls and young women with some schooling are clearly at an advantage with regard to economic opportunities, but even those with little formal education can learn vocational skills that will help them to stay out of poverty and away from harmful or exploitative work.

7. Ministry of Health to provide life skills and reproductive health education and services

Adolescent boys and girls should be empowered to manage their sexual and reproductive health issues through different approaches such as comprehensive sexuality education in school, life skills-based education and youth information centres. These efforts should both target unmarried and married girls with the objective to delaying child marriage until age 18 and delaying pregnancy as well promoting safe sexual practices.

At its root, child marriage is perpetuated by structural gender inequality, including unequal power relations and discriminatory norms around girls' value, sexuality and role in society. Eliminating gender inequality and empowering young women requires the fulfilment of girls' basic needs and their rights such as the right to live free from violence and exploitation, the right to education, health, nutrition, which are undermined by child marriage. Therefore, ending this practice requires collective efforts on all fronts, addressing the underlying social, economic, judicial, religious and political determinants of child marriage.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Child marriage is a traditional practice that violates the rights of boys and girls and undermines efforts to achieve sustainable development. To end child marriage and meet the needs of married children, African countries must leverage the expertise and skills of local change agents and international stakeholders, and maximize the impact of established best practices. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals provides guidance that will help world governments ensure that boys and girls can reach their full potential by ending child marriage, end gender-based violence, foster gender equality, and promote girls empowerment. With the full commitment of governments, development practitioners, civil societies, communities, families and girls themselves, a world without child marriage can become a reality.

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