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ASSIGNMENT: Write on any topic of your choice.

CHILD MARRIAGE: Complicated Problem, Simple Solution

Value Girls

The Problem

In the next decade, 14.2 million girls will be married

under the age of 18 per year, roughly 39,000 each

day.1 Early marriage thwarts a girl’s chances at , endangers her health and cuts short her personal

growth and development.

Health risks to the girl are particularly troubling. Girls

under 15 face the highest risk of death in childbirth.2

Complications in pregnancy and childbirth are the

leading cause of death among adolescent girls in developing countries.3 Child brides are more likely to experience violence in their marriages, less likely to be

able to negotiate for their own rights, more isolated,

and more likely to get HIV.4 The children of a child

bride are more likely to die in infancy, more likely to

be malnourished, and less likely to get an educaƟon.5

Taken together, the costs of this practice are too high

to be ignored.

The Causes

Child marriage is a problem that happens in all religion, across income brackets, countries, and levels of

Education.    At its heart, child marriage happens be-

cause communities do not value girls as much as boys.

Girls’ value is often as labour for household chores and

a future mother, not as an individual. That’s why glob-

ally, 14% of girls are married before they are 18, and

only 5% of boys.6

Beyond that, each community has its own complex

reasons for child marriage, and causes vary widely

based on context—and any solutions have to address

the causes in that context.    Some of the key reasons

that communities cite for child marriage:

Lack of alternative for girls—Child marriage is the only option for some girls to have a secure future because

they cannot be educated or earn an income on their

own. Parents will marry a girl early to ensure that she

can have a secure future, rather than risk waiting and

having her not get married at all.

 Concern for girls safety—Parents worry that as a

girl hits puberty, she will be subject to harassment

and violence, so they marry her to protect her.

 Economics—As a girl gets older, her dowry costs

usually go up, as do the costs of her education and

support.  Parents marry a girl early to keep dowry

low, and so they don’t have to support her.  In systems where there is a bride price (parents get money from the groom’s family when their daughter

weds), parents may also marry a daughter for the

cash they will get.

 Controlling a girl’s sexuality—Many people believe that having a daughter marry while she is a

virgin is paramount to family honour, and so they

marry her young to ensure her virginity at marriage. Young girls also have little access to family

planning, and if they get pregnant, their parents

will want to marry them immediately.

 Demand—Parents-in-law often want their son’s

wife to be younger so that she will be easier to

control and stay home to take care of the house-

hold.  They also want a young bride who will have

many grandchildren.

The Solution.

Since the root causes of child marriage stem from not

valuing girls, the solution is to work with communities

to increase the value of girls. CARE works with families,

Communities and local organizations to reduce the

prevalence and migrated harmful impacts of child marriage through educational and behaviour-change programs.

CARE focuses on finding community-driven solutions

that raise the value of girls, and increase opportunities

for everyone, girls and boys, men and women.  In each

context, we work with the community to uncover and

address the root causes in that context, and to build

social will to support girls’ rights and opportunities.

CARE also advocates at the local, national, and global

levels to increase the commitment to ending child

marriage, by passing laws to protect girls and prevent

child marriage, and to implement laws that already

exist. Our advocacy extends beyond a focus on formal

policy change, towards the larger goal of influencing

social and structural change to address early marriage.

Some CARE Programs

Tipping Point (Nepal and Bangladesh): Aimed at map-

ping underlying causes of child marriage and coming

up with social change strategies to prevent child mar-

riage, the Tipping Point is active in over 100 communities in Bangladesh in Nepal.  The project connects local

to USG and global advocacy, and is piling research

and social change techniques.

Girls Not Brides, USA: CARE has been a long-time leader in advocating to priories child marriage in US foreign policy.    CARE co-chairs the GNB USA coalition

which is comprised of more than 50 organizations with

offices in the United States. GNB USA is affiliated with

Girls Not Brides, a global partnership of more than 300

civil society organizations from 67 countries working

to address child marriage. CARE and our partners have

applied strategic and consistent pressure on US policy

makers and have had terrific success over the recent years

to secure strong political and financial commitments to

end child marriage and support married adolescents

around the world. Specifically, GNB USA was instrumental

in securing language on early marriage was included in

congressional re-authorization of the Violence against

Women Act (VAWA) legislation, mandating the Secretary

of State to develop a multi-year, multi-sectorial national

strategy to end child marriage. Current efforts are targeted at the US Administration to support and monitor implementation of recent policy successes.

TESFA (Ethiopia): A development and research project

that seeks to bring measureable positive change in the

economic outcomes and sexual reproductive health of

adolescent girls who are or have ever been married. The

project reached over 5,000 married adolescents and

stopped at least 180 child marriages. Girls have reported

more support from their families on family planning as

well as more favourable attitude from husbands towards

family planning. Additionally, girls have reported improvement in school attendance, mobility, perceptions of self-

worth, and mental health. Increased couple communication, particularly around decision-making is also reported

among parcipants.