Ending Child Marriage in Humanitarian Settings:
Ensuring accountability to girls through improved data collection, analysis, and use

An Urgent Need to End Child Marriage

Child marriage is a form of gender-based violence that robs children of their agency to make decisions about their lives, disrupts their education, and drives vulnerability to violence, discrimination and abuse. Child marriage prevents children’s full participation in economic, political and social spheres throughout their lives.

By 2030, over 150 million more girls will marry before they are 18 — despite global progress! More than 80% of children married before age 18 are girls.ii

Child brides are frequently deprived of their rights to health, education and safety. Girls who marry before 18 years of age are less likely to stay and school and as a result have nine percent lower earnings as adults.iii Additionally, girls married before 18 face increased isolation and are at higher risk of physical and sexual violence at the hands of their spouse.iv

Significantly, 90% of births to girls aged 15-19 occur within marriage.vii In addition, babies born to adolescent mothers are more likely to have low birth weight, and frequently suffer from malnutrition and underdevelopment.viii

Accelerating Progress in Humanitarian Settings

Girls living in countries affected by conflict or other humanitarian crises are often the most vulnerable of all to child marriage. Nine out of the ten countries with the highest child marriage rates are considered either fragile or extremely fragile states.ix

Significantly, in humanitarian contexts, overlapping and intersecting crises, including economic collapse and loss of resources, food insecurity, the breakdown of rule of law and protective social structures, and increased violence all exacerbate gender inequality, and can serve as drivers of child marriage.x

Individuals’ own intersectional identities also play an important role in determining vulnerability to child marriage in humanitarian contexts, particularly in regards to gender, age, nationality, ethnicity, class/caste, religion, disability and urban or rural status.

Data Gaps in Humanitarian Settings

To end child marriage, it is critical to have comprehensive data to identify problems, galvanize resources, and inform solutions. There is an urgent need for enhanced data collection on child marriage in humanitarian contexts. Without the right data, funding needs are not met and girls’ needs remain invisible.

UN actors have flagged existing data gaps on child marriage as an ongoing barrier to its eradication and have called for all stakeholders to address these gaps through enhanced data collection tools and establishing new tools where necessary.xi

Currently, the most comprehensive source for global data on child marriage is a database owned and maintained by UNICEF.xii This data primarily derives from Demographic and Household Surveys (DHS) and Multiple Indicator Surveys (MICS), with additional data from Family Health Surveys, national surveys on health issues, and census data. UNICEF also pulls information from surveys on wealth, educational status, residence, household food security, and other areas to see how it correlates with child marriage. Drawing on age data, UNICEF use the datasets to identify trends in child marriage prevalence over time. These

Girls married before the age of 18 are also at higher risk of experiencing dangerous complications in pregnancy and childbirth. Complications during pregnancy and childbirth is the number one killer of girls aged 15-19 worldwide, and 12 million girls marry each year before they reach the age of 18.
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Datasets are vital in measuring progress on the eradication of child marriage globally. Yet when it comes to addressing child marriage in humanitarian settings, these datasets have limitations:

- DHS and MICS are mainly carried out in stable settings and only occasionally collected in humanitarian crises;
- DHS, MICS and census data, when collected, are collected every 3-10 years, meaning critical data from periods of fragility may be missed;
- Collection of data on displaced populations is not consistent;
- Data is country-level but does not get to community or more local analysis needed for humanitarian contexts;
- Data only provides information on prevalence, and not incidence.

The existing datasets do not capture the dynamic nature of child marriage, particularly in humanitarian settings. They are also missing community-level analysis that identifies drivers in these settings, which are more localized and experience greater variation over time than in stable settings.

Building upon existing data collection mechanisms would allow for a much greater understanding of the complex drivers and impacts of child marriage in humanitarian crises. Data must be collected more frequently, and data collection mechanisms must be able to deliver snapshots in time. Datasets should include more consistent and comprehensive indicators on prevalence, incidence, trends, drivers, push and pull factors, and consequences of child marriage. Standardizing question formats across humanitarian and development settings would further allow for comparability.

Recommendations

The international community, including donors and humanitarian actors should:

1) **Demonstrate political leadership to prioritize and act on the urgently needed development of enhanced data collection tools on child marriage in humanitarian settings.**

2) **Coordinate to determine which data tools can and should expand to incorporate data on child marriage in humanitarian settings, and where such data will be housed and maintained.**

3) **Commit sustained financial and human resources to support the collection, coordination, analysis, disaggregation and use of enhanced data on child marriage in humanitarian settings.**

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2. Ibid., p. 24
4. Ibid.
7. WHO, *Fact Sheet Adolescent Pregnancy*
8. Save the Children and UC Berkeley School of Law, p. 8
10. Ibid., p. 8 – Save the Children and the Human Rights Center of the University of California Berkeley School of Law have begun a three-phase research initiative to address the knowledge gap and identify what works to prevent and respond to child marriage. The initiative includes: **Phase 1**: A review of child marriage prevention and response interventions in humanitarian and development contexts, including a desk review of the evidence and lessons learned from practitioners; **Phase 2**: A multi-country study in humanitarian contexts to identify drivers, decision-making factors, and solutions related to child marriage prevention and response; and **Phase 3**: A co-designed intervention, informed by girls’ voices and community stakeholders, to be piloted and evaluated in a humanitarian context.
11. See AHRC/RES/35/16 which called for a data portal on CEM in humanitarian settings and A/RES/72/153