

**Submission for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
(OHCHR) report on child, early and forced marriage
(A/HRC/RES/24/23)**

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Save the Children is the world's leading independent organisation for children, working in 120 countries through our members, programmes and partners. Our mission is to inspire breakthroughs in the way the world treats children and to achieve immediate and lasting change in their lives. In 2012, Save the Children's work worldwide touched the lives of over 125 million children and directly reached through its programmes 45 million children.¹

Save the Children has a dual mandate as a development and humanitarian agency, covering issues such as health and nutrition, education, child protection and child rights governance. Save the Children's work on early marriage falls within the ambit of our child protection programmes. This submission is based on inputs collected from Save the Children members, country offices and partners working in Bangladesh, Nepal, India, Yemen, Afghanistan, Bhutan and Pakistan.

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 boys². 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. 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. The more recent phenomenon of "love marriage" among children is also being witnessed in some countries.

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

¹ Save the Children, Annual Review 1202, "Inspiring Breakthroughs in the Way the World Treats Children"
http://www.savethechildren.net/sites/default/files/SCI_AR_2012_NotInteractive_LoRes.pdf

² Save the Children, "State of the World's Mothers", 2004

increased risks for young mothers and their children. Child marriage 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.

a) How States are implementing their obligations under international human rights conventions and international human rights treaties on child, early and forced marriage at the national level;

Several international human rights conventions prohibit child marriage, either directly or indirectly by prohibiting all forms of discrimination against girls and harmful traditional practices to children. The Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages is the first binding UN treaty prohibiting forced and early marriages, requiring States Parties to eliminate the marriage of girls under the age of puberty, to stipulate a minimum age of marriage and to establish measures for the registration of all marriages. The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women stipulates that the minimum age for marriage should not be lower than the age of majority and forbids discrimination between men and women in this respect. Bearing in mind the principle of evolving capacities and children's right to special protection, UN treaty bodies and agencies recommended that the minimum age should be 18 years in line with the definition of the child in Article 1 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Many countries do not comply with these provisions by failing to adopt a minimum age for marriage (for example, Yemen and Saudi Arabia) or by adopting laws setting low minimum ages, below the legal age of majority, and different ages between men and women.

In the case of Yemen, the country made a retrogressive move by removing the minimum age previously set at 15 years in the Personal Status Law³. In 1999 the Parliament abolished the legal minimum age for marriage for girls and boys, citing religious grounds. Despite several subsequent attempts from parliaments and civil society to reintroduce a minimum age for marriage, there is still a legal gap on the age of marriage, leaving children of any age deprived of legal protection and extremely vulnerable to forced marriage.

Even when minimum ages are set in law, discriminatory provisions between men and women are common in many countries. For example, Pakistan, Afghanistan,

³ Human Rights Watch report, "How Come You Allow Little Girls to Get Married?: Child marriage in Yemen", 2011

Burkina Faso, to name a few, have defined lower age of marriage for women, ranging between 15 and 17, than for men, whose age is set at 18 years old.

In countries where a mixed legal system of civil, customary and religious laws prevails, there can be contradictory provisions on child marriage between different laws. For example in the case of Afghanistan, Article 70 of the Civil Law, sets the minimum age of marriage for girls at 16 but it competes with regulations in Sharia law by which a father can marry his daughter after she reaches puberty and how he deems fit, which is often considered at a much younger age. In Sri Lanka, different laws applies to different religious communities, with non-Muslim girls allowed to legally marry at 18, while Muslim girls are allowed by law to wed at 15⁴. In other countries, customary law considers a child as an adult either when the child reaches a certain age set under national law or when the child is married, in which case the latter is deprived of child protection. The decision of the Supreme Court of Indonesia on the subject of early marriage and the worst forms of child labour reflects the strong hold of harmful customary laws in society and their impact on children. Indeed when a 17 years old girl was found working as waitress in a brothel house, the defendant was convicted by the District Court but later released free as they found the girl is married.⁵

b) Steps taken to prohibit child, early and forced marriage as well as examples of positive experience and challenges encountered at the national level in adopting policies, measures and implementing strategies to address this issue;

Legislative responses to child marriage and challenges

Many national governments have enacted legislations in alignment with the international instruments and framed clear laws to prevent child marriage; however enforcement remains the biggest challenge. In South Asia for example, most countries have enacted laws that stipulate 18 as the minimum legal age for marriage for girls and yet the practice of child marriage remains widespread, as many law enforcement officials and families are not aware of these laws. A study in Nepal⁶ found that more than 50% of households from the 15 districts surveyed in Nepal did not know the legal age of marriage. Even when they are aware of the legislation, they rarely view child marriage as an offence but rather as a culturally legitimate practice.

⁴ SAIEVAC (South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children), “Child Marriage in South Asia: realities, responses, and the way forward”, 2013

⁵ Available from <http://putusan.mabkamabagung.go.id/putusan/ecccd689cdd6e6de22ea66e0d9ace9f8> (accessed 19 June 2013)

[hereinafter *Case Decision*].in SAIEVAC, “Child Marriage in South Asia: realities, responses, and the way forward” 2013

⁶ Save the Children, Plan, World Vision “Child marriage in Nepal: Research report”, 2012

The Nepalese Child Marriage law stipulates that both girls and boys can marry at age 18 with parental consent, and at age 20 without consent. In addition, it recognizes daughters as rightful heirs, and increases the punishment for child marriage to imprisonment for up to three years and a fine of up to ten thousand rupees, and with an increase in the age of the girl, the punishment decreases⁷. On July 13, 2006, the Supreme Court issued a directive order urging the government to act immediately and implement the legal provisions⁸ (Supreme Court of Nepal, 2063 BS). Yet a study in Nepal⁹ found that despite these measures, there was no evidence of reporting of cases of child marriage in the survey districts and participants felt that it was impractical for children to file a case against their parents.

India adopted the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA) in 2006 which significantly reinforced India's legal framework on child marriage. The PCMA provides for several measures to prevent child marriages and protect the victims including, the intervention of courts through stay orders to stop imminent child marriages and punitive measures against perpetrators. It also gives victims the right to seek annulment of marriage and to obtain redress by claiming financial support from the husband/in-laws to the separated female until they are remarried. However the enforcement of the PCMA remains a challenge, with few prosecutions and convictions of persons perpetrating child marriage. In 2010 only 111 cases were reported under the PCMA and only 11 were convicted (National Crime Records Bureau)¹⁰.

The legal prohibition alone often fails to act as a deterrent for families who continue to marry their young daughters illegally, including by circumventing the laws. Families may arrange a religious marriage ceremony for their underage daughters and then wait to officially register the marriage after she reaches age 18. According to the U.S. Department of State's 2010 Human Rights Report, many Maldivians travel to Pakistan or India to carry out illegal child marriages. Whereas in Bhutan child marriage has become less common in urban areas, girls as young as 15 in remote villages are still reportedly married in secret ceremonies¹¹.

Laws on child marriage often compete and coexist with customary practices that are deeply rooted in the society and are major barrier to the elimination of child marriage. In Pakistan, the tribal customary practice of *vani* and *swara* which

⁷ SAIEVAC, "Child Marriage in South Asia: realities, responses, and the way forward", 2013

⁸ UNICEF, "Child marriage and the law", 2008

[http://www.unicef.org/policyanalysis/files/Child_Marriage_and_the_Law\(1\).pdf](http://www.unicef.org/policyanalysis/files/Child_Marriage_and_the_Law(1).pdf)

⁹ Save the Children, Plan, World Vision "Child marriage in Nepal", 2012

¹⁰ National Crime Records Bureau in UNICEF Information Factsheet on child marriage, November 2011, http://www.unicef.org/india/Child_Marriage_Fact_Sheet_Nov2011_final.pdf

¹¹ U.S. Department of State's 2010 Human Rights Report in SAIEVAC, Child Marriage in South Asia: realities, responses, and the way forward, 2013

mandate the forced marriage of girls as compensation or currency to settle a dispute or debt, is still widely used by communities in rural areas.

In the case of love marriages, it is difficult to stop child marriage by legal action when it is children themselves who decide to marry at an early age¹². Forceful actions, like separating children who marry too early, can even sometimes lead to harmful consequences in the lives of those who marry for love. For example in Nepal, there were cases of girls who committed suicide after being separated from their intended husbands¹³.

Local and national mechanisms and schemes to tackle child marriage

Efforts have been made by governments to set up mechanisms and national and local level to enforce the laws and raise awareness of the population about child marriage and the legislation in place. In the Maldives, the government has established Children's Courts and Units for the Rights of the Children (URC) to work towards eliminating child marriage and violence against children. In Bangladesh, Gram Sarkars (village government bodies) have taken on the responsibility of combating child marriage.¹⁴ The state of Bihar in India has taken a comprehensive approach to tackling the issue of child marriage by mainstreaming girls' concerns in a number of initiatives, policies & schemes. For example, the government has introduced several schemes (*Kanya Vivah Yojana* and *Mukhyamantri Kanya Suraksha Yojana*) which encourage marriage only on completion of legal age for girls through financial incentives. Under these schemes, the government provide cash transfers to girls who remain unmarried until they attain 18 years of age. Other schemes support girls' education and efforts to keep them in schools through financial support to families. These are positive steps but the impact of such programmes is unknown because the girls who were born at the time these programs started have not yet turned 18.¹⁵

Marriage and birth registration

Marriage registration is also a challenge despite the existence of laws making registration compulsory. In 2012, the total marriage registration was 56% but 23% had not registered their marriages by choice and almost 21% had no idea about marriage registration¹⁶. Many countries have taken steps to address low birth and marriage registration levels with the view to facilitating the enforcement of child marriage laws and strengthening child protection. In Bangladesh, a national law was passed in 2004 requiring that all births be registered in order to determine a

¹² Save the Children, Plan, World Vision "Child marriage in Nepal: Research report ", 2012

¹³ Ibid. p 43.

¹⁴ SAIEVAC, "Child Marriage in South Asia: realities, responses, and the way forward", 2013

¹⁵ International Center for Research on women, "Knot ready: Lessons from India on Delaying Marriage for Girls", 2008

¹⁶ Save the Children, Plan, World Vision "Child marriage in Nepal: Research report ", 2012

girl's age when she marries. This has resulted in high birth registration rates in Bangladesh with registered births increasing from just 9.8 percent to 53.6 percent between 2006 and 2009¹⁷. Similarly in Bhutan, the government has made birth registration compulsory within one month of the birth. In Yemen, a presidential decree on civil status and civil registration, amended in 2003 requires that all births must be registered with the Ministry of Health within 60 days. Similarly, all marriage contracts must be registered at the Ministry of Justice within 15 days. The registrations are then sent to the Department of Civil Status at the Ministry of Interior.¹⁸ In India, a 2006 Supreme Court decision requires the registration of all marriages.

c) Policies, projects and measures undertaken at national and sub-national levels, including by United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, civil society and other relevant stakeholders to promote the elimination of child, early and forced marriage specifically including action taken to address the issue in practicing communities, and to address or mitigate its impact, making specific reference to the outcomes of such policies, projects and measures;

Save the Children applies a multi-sectoral approach with a combination of activities aimed at tackling the root causes of child marriage and at mitigating the impact on children. A critical component to this effort is supporting awareness-raising and public education programmes about child marriage and its negative effects to help change attitudes and cultural norms that perpetuate child marriage. Findings from a study in Nepal¹⁹ revealed that 86% of household heads are in favour of educating people through awareness campaigns in order to prevent child marriage.

In Nepal, Save the Children has undertaken a number of initiatives to promote behaviour changes among children and the community with respect to gender equality: (a) The « Choices » Curriculum²⁰ is a research project that explored the themes of gender inequity and power with young adolescents, boys and girls, involved in child clubs, identifying small actions that adolescents can take in their individual lives to promote gender equity and to empower girls. Results from this study showed the effectiveness of this type of intervention in influencing children's behaviour towards more gender equitable attitudes; (b) The "Promises" approach

¹⁷ SAIEVAC, "Child Marriage in South Asia: realities, responses, and the way forward", 2013

¹⁸ Presidential Decree No. 23, 1991, amended law no. 23, 2003 on Civil Status and Civil Registrations (Al Ahwal al Madaniya wa al Sajil al Madani), in Human Rights Watch report, "How Come You Allow Little Girls to Get Married? Child marriage in Yemen", 2011

¹⁹ Save the Children, Plan, World Vision "Child marriage in Nepal: Research report", 2012

²⁰ The Institute for reproductive Health Georgetown University, "Utilizing Participatory Data Collection Methods to Evaluate Programs for Very Young Adolescents: An Evaluation of Save the Children's Choices Curriculum in Siraha, Nepal", 2011

http://www.iywg.org/sites/iywg/files/utilizing_participatory_data_collection_methods_to_evaluate_programs_for_very_young_adolescents_an_evaluation_of_save_the_childrens_choices_curriculum_in_siraha_nepal.pdf

mobilises the influence of “change agents” that are respected within the community and builds on communication techniques to promote messages on girls’ education and domestic violence. These communication techniques include emotion-based messages, word-of-mouth marketing and influence principles to bring about powerful behaviour changes within the community. This approach brings an interesting perspective on the factors and dynamics behind message diffusion and behaviour changes that can be valuable for efforts aimed at eliminating child marriage; (c) The project “Allies for Change: Creating Safer Environment for Girls, Women and Boys”²¹ aims to involve boys and young men to work together with girls in promoting safer environment for girls, women and boys and in tackling violence among children. Boys are considered as key partners in this project to challenge gender norms and perceptions of violence as socially acceptable behaviour and to mobilise the community in this effort. Activities included capacity building of children, peer education, awareness raising and advocacy campaigns street dramas and other art activities. Results from the project include community mobilisation against gender based violence and active participation of boys and young men on a voluntary basis to empower girls and the community on the issue.

In India, Save the Children, in collaboration with local partners, is implementing a project targeting the rural communities across 50 villages in Kkagaria and Madhepura districts in the state of Bihar, aimed at generating awareness at the individual and community levels on child marriage. Main activities include : (a) enhancing children’s and community members’ life skills and knowledge about child marriage through positive messages on girls’ education and child protection; (b) engaging the community in peer education and mentoring against child marriage; (c) using mass media for social mobilisation through art activities such as puppet shows and street plays on child marriage and for advocacy purposes; (d) strengthening community-based child protection systems, including community members such as teachers, community leaders, children’s councils representatives and parents, to prevent child marriages; (e) building child friendly spaces to provide safe places for children’s development and interaction with their peers. Through this project Save the Children is also empowering children to be agents of change in the prevention of child marriages in the community by supporting and building the capacity of children’s councils (Bal Panchayat). These children’s councils are the voice of all children in their community and are tasked with raising awareness on child marriage and monitoring and responding to child protection issues, including child marriages. Successful outcomes from this project have already been noted such as the establishment of children’s councils, increased school attendance, quantitative declines in child marriage and heightened awareness levels in parents. A representative from the Children’s Council said « *the*

²¹Save the Children, “Allies for Change: Engaging boys or social change in Surkhet, Nepal”, 2011 <http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/sites/default/files/documents/4198.pdf>

one single achievement of our Bal Panchayat we are immensely proud of is that not a single child marriage has been held in our village this year ».

In Egypt Save the Children's program Ishraq²² seeks to improve education, health, and social opportunities for out of school, rural adolescent girls aged between 10-15 through an integrated package of literacy, life skills and sports. The program also involves awareness meetings with parents, community leaders, and boys to help create an environment conducive to social change where girls' education is valued and recognised as an imperative.

d) Surveys, assessments and studies carried out at national and sub-national level on the prevalence of child, early and forced marriage and/or its impact on the human rights of women and girls and other affected groups;

Currently over 60 million girls and women are affected by child marriage globally²³. This number is likely to be underestimated as many marriages are not accounted for due to ineffective birth and marriage registration systems which might affect the availability and reliability of data on early marriages.

Girls are significantly more likely than boys to be married as children – 30 per cent of girls aged 15-19 years are currently married or in union in South Asia, compared to just 5 per cent of boys in the same age bracket²⁴. In majority of the countries across in Africa and Asia the legal age at marriage differs between girl and boy. Across the globe 54% of the countries have minimum legal age similar for both boys and girls while it is different in another 46% countries²⁵. Moreover, child marriage is most prevalent among the illiterate and the poorest groups in Nepal such as the Janajati (indigenous ethnic groups) and the Dalit²⁶.

Child marriage is particularly pervasive across South Asia and Africa, where 50-70 percent of girls in some countries are married before the age of 18²⁷. In South Asia, 46% of women between ages 20-24 report being married before age 18 in 2010, this translated to 24.4 million women in the region. Estimates project that 130 million more girls in South Asia will be married as children between 2010 and 2030²⁸.

²² Save the Children, "Ishraq Plus Baseline Report", 2012

²³ ICRW, "Solutions to End Child Marriage: What the Evidence Shows", 2011

²⁴ UNICEF global databases, 2011. Based on DHS, MICS and other national surveys, 2000-2010

²⁵ Right To Education Project. "National law and policies on minimum ages" <http://www.right-to-education.org/node/58>

²⁶ Save the Children, Plan, World Vision "Child marriage in Nepal: Research report", 2012

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ UNFPA, "Marrying too young, End Child Marriage", 2012

The prevalence of child marriage varies substantially between and within countries in South Asia²⁹. Bangladesh (DHS, 2011) has the highest prevalence of child marriage in the region (66 per cent) followed by Afghanistan (46 percent), India (46 percent, NFHS-2005-06) and Nepal (41 percent, DHS, 2011)³⁰. These four countries are considered the region's 'hot spots' due to their high child marriage prevalence. Girls living in rural areas are hardest hit by child marriage, and the problem is worst in rural Bangladesh with 70 percent of girls married early, followed by India with 56 percent. Girls from poorer households and scheduled castes and tribes in addition to girls with less education tend to marry at a younger age³¹.

In the Arab region, the highest rates of child marriage are seen in the poorest countries—Yemen, Sudan, Somalia, and South Sudan—where annual per capita incomes in 2011 were less than US\$2,000. Egypt—the most populous Arab country—is home to the largest number of child brides in the region³². Compared to a generation ago, rates of child marriage have declined in Arab countries. Still, a significant number do marry young, and the decline in early marriage has stopped in some countries such as Iraq, where 25 percent of girls marry before age 18 and 6 percent do so before age 15.

In some countries, the prevalence of child marriage among the youngest adolescents has decreased. A recent quantitative analysis of changes in the age of marriage in Bangladesh, Nepal, India and Pakistan reveals that over the past two decades (1991- 2007) significant relative reductions have occurred in the marriage of girls under the age of 14 across all four nations³³. However there has been no change in the marriage of girls aged 16-17 for any nation except Bangladesh – where marriages in this age group actually increased by nearly 35 percent.

Some studies have also documented the impact of child marriages on girls, particularly on health, education, social life and physical integrity. Girls who marry at a young age are under great pressure to prove their fertility by bearing children immediately. Girls who marry between the ages of 10 and 14 face five times the risk of maternal mortality during pregnancy or childbirth compared to mothers in their early 20s³⁴. Other health risks linked to early pregnancies include obstructed labour, fistula and HIV/AIDS. For example, fistula is most common in the poorest countries – places like Benin, Chad, Ethiopia, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Uganda and Zambia – where child marriage is common and trained

²⁹ ICRW, "Solutions to End Child Marriage: What the Evidence Shows", 2011

³⁰ SAIEVAC, Child Marriage in South Asia: realities, responses, and the way forward, 2013

³¹ UNICEF, Information Factsheet on child marriage in India, 2011

³² *World Bank data, accessed at <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD>, on May 10, 2013*, in Farzaneh, Roudi-Fahim, and Shaimaa Ibrahim, "Ending Child marriage in the Arab region", 2013.

³³ *Raj Anita, Changes in Prevalence of Girl Child Marriage in South Asia: The Journal of the American Medical Association, 2012*, in SAIEVAC, Child Marriage in South Asia: realities, responses, and the way forward,

³⁴ UNICEF, "Early Marriage in South Asia: A Discussion Paper". 2009

doctors and well-equipped hospitals are scarcest³⁵. Child marriage also leads to isolation and can cause depression. A survey in Nepal found that 75% of respondents said that females who marry young have to face social problems such as discrimination, poor socialisation and lack of leadership³⁶. Some respondents also reported that such females have poor relationships with their families. The problem of being busy with household chores was also mentioned. All these factors perpetuate the cycle of poverty and gender gap in terms of access to education and professional opportunities.

Low education levels among parents and poor access to schools, particularly in rural areas impede girls' education and increase the likelihood of early marriage. For instance girls in Nepal who completed grade 10 are five times more likely to marry at age 18 or older than those who have not received any education at all (Nepal Demographic Health Survey, 2011)³⁷.

A study in India³⁸ found that young women who married before age 18 were twice as likely to report being beaten, slapped or threatened by their husbands than girls who married later. Also they were three times as likely to report being forced to have sex without their consent in the previous six months. Recent research in Bangladesh³⁹ reveal that girls regularly face domestic violence if they fail to meet household and sexual demands and expectations from husband and family members This includes conflicts over dowry, which are a frequent cause of heinous instances of violence directed at girls including mental torture and physical abuse. The pressure of early marriage is even felt by young men in Bangladesh, as they attributed their aggressive behaviour towards their wives to their unpreparedness for marriage and family life.

e) Recommendations on or examples of good practices regarding possible appropriate measures and strategies to prevent and eliminate child, early and forced marriage.

Child marriage is an issue that cannot be solved in isolation as it results from a complexity of social, cultural and economic dimensions and widespread gender discrimination. Ending this practice requires collective efforts on all fronts, addressing the underlying social, economic, judicial, religious and political determinants of child marriage. Save the Children would like to make the following recommendations based on its experience from country programmes:

³⁵ Save the Children, "State of the World's Mothers", 2004

³⁶ Save the Children, Plan, World Vision "Child marriage in Nepal: Research report ", 2012

³⁷ SAIEVAC, Child Marriage in South Asia: realities, responses, and the way forward, 2013

³⁸ ICRW, "How to End Child Marriage: Action Strategies for Prevention and Protection, 2013

³⁹ World Vision, DFID, "Untying the Knot Exploring Early Marriage in Fragile States", March 2013

- **Bring national legislation in conformity with international treaties, taking into account the recommendations from Treaty Bodies on the minimum age of marriage**

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. 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.

- **Raise awareness on child marriage and promote gender equality**

Changing people's attitudes and perceptions toward early 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.

- **Enhance safety in public areas**

Saving family honor—which is linked to preserving girls' virginity and eliminating the possibility (or even suspicion) of premarital affairs—is a main reason that families marry off their daughters at a young age. 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.

- **Develop and strengthen effective child protection mechanisms, including community based child protection systems.**

Strengthening child protection mechanisms at national and local level through adequate resources and coordination between different stakeholders should be an integral part of efforts to eliminate child marriage. National and community-based child protection systems should be promoted to provide a comprehensive,

sustainable and coordinated solution to protect all children. An effective system consists of a set of laws and policies which comply with the UNCRC, a central Government coordination mechanism with a clear mandate to prevent and respond to child protection concerns, adequately funded child protection services, regulations and monitoring at all levels, a committed workforce with competence and mandate, data collection and awareness-raising. A child protection system considers all root causes when protecting children; it includes all children without discrimination, it is based on long-term interventions and it is built on the coordination between different sectors and actors – including the civil society

- **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.

- **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.

- **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.

- **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.

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