

**Submission to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
(OHCHR) report on Child, Early and Forced marriage**
[UNGA Resolution 69/156](#)
October 2015

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.

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.

Introduction

Child, Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM) critically infringes on children's rights and negatively affects girls' health, education, psychosocial wellbeing and lifelong development. Save the Children works in all top 20 countries where child marriage affects 41% - 75% of all girls. By the end of the decade an estimated 142 million girls will be married as children.

CEFM constitutes a serious threat to multiple aspects of the physical and psychological health of women and girls including their sexual and reproductive health and rights, significantly increasing the risk of early pregnancy, maternal and newborn mortality and morbidity, stillbirths, obstetric fistula and so on. Indeed, stillbirths and newborn deaths are 50% higher among infants or adolescent mothers.

CEFM also puts girls at risk of violence, abuse and exploitation. Early marriage also results in separation from family and friends and lack of freedom to participate in community activities, which can all have major consequences on girls' mental and physical well-being.

Therefore, Save the Children is working with States and other partners to enact and enforce laws to prohibit and prevent child marriage, and create policies that improve the alternative opportunities for young girls by investing in their education and by ensuring access to sexual and reproductive health services.

We believe families and communities must be mobilised to take a stand against CEFM and to address gender discrimination. To this end, boys and men should be

key partners in this work, and fathers should be mobilised not to marry their daughters under the age of 18. Empowerment of girls and women and their access to comprehensive quality, information, education and sexual and reproductive services is also essential.

Save the Children works on the prevention and elimination of CEFM in several of the countries with the highest rates of child marriage across Asia and Africa. Beyond these, Save the Children also continues to work on CEFM at global level in New York and Geneva, regional in Southeast Asia and the African Union, and also in situations of refugee camp settings, for instance in Jordan.

I. Addressing the issue

Save the Children aims to address child marriage across all of our core program areas, including education, health and child protection. We believe that only by addressing the root causes of child marriage – such as gender inequality, poverty, low levels of education – will we be successful in ending child marriage.

We are, therefore, working to change social norms and institutions that perpetuate the harmful practice of CEFM. Save the Children encourages and facilitates child participation at all levels of our work to ensure both girls and boys are engaged in dialogue and advocacy to end child marriage and promote gender equality.

Save the Children also contributed (see attached submission) to the 2014 OHCHR Report on CEFM ([A/HRC/RES/24/23](#)). The present submission compiles recommendations extracted from selected country programmes on the prevention and elimination of CEFM.

Save the Children Ethiopia

Ethiopia is one of the top 20 'Hot Spot' Countries for child marriage. It has been established that child marriage leads to higher maternal mortality and infant mortality rates; and has considerable implications for social development in terms of low levels of education, poor health and lack of personal autonomy. Poverty ultimately fuels child marriage, which in turn perpetuates poverty itself.

CEFM continues to be prevalent in the Amhara Regional State in Ethiopia (North West of the country), despite the regional government's efforts on its eradication. In this region, nearly 50% of girls are in fact married by the age of 15 and around 68%

are married by the age of 18. The average age at marriage in this area is of [14.4 years](#), the lowest in the country.

The Government of Ethiopia is aware that child marriage puts a brake on development. Therefore ending child marriage is one of the government's social development targets in the country's Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP). As a result, different laws and regulations have been drafted to end child marriage in Ethiopia.

More importantly a National Strategy on Harmful Traditional Practices (HTP) and an Action Plan on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting, Child Marriage and Abduction has been drafted. The strategy was launched by the government in partnership with donors, civil society organizations and other development actors. Over the past three years, Save the Children's interventions through [Amhara Women's Association](#) illustrate the importance of targeting families and communities with multiple messages about child marriage to foster social change.

The recommendations from Save the Children's personnel working in the country in terms of prevention and eradication of this phenomenon in the aforementioned region are the following: to raise awareness about the consequences of CEFM among community members; to build the capacity of women's structures to increase their performances (i.e. women development army, the Amhara Women's Association and the youth association); to strengthen the integration of government sectoral bureaus and non-governmental organisations working on this issue; and to reduce poverty.

Save the Children empowered local organisations, such as the Amhara Women's Association, by providing capacity development trainings for them to do their own advocacy and campaigning around ending child marriage. The Amhara Women's Association promotes income generation for women, and organizes girls' clubs. It also mobilizes communities against child marriage through their local zone, Woreda and Kebele (village) representatives, who report on child marriages planned in their community.

The Amhara Women's Association through the support provided by Save the Children Ethiopia conducted advocacy workshops with district-level judicial bodies and law enforcement agencies as well as with religious leaders. These workshops discussed the legal rights of girls and mobilized support among influential leaders to end child marriage. Strengthened capacity of members of the Amhara Women's

Association, the police, and parliamentarians has improved the efforts to stop this harmful traditional practice. As a result of this work, it is estimated that 17,000 arranged child marriages have been cancelled.

Girls who get married before the age of 18 are not prepared, neither physically or mentally, to carry the responsibilities related to marriage. And, although, the focus of the government of other organisations working on the issue have been on prevention, women and girls already married need to receive training on family planning matters and business and life skills. Girls' clubs in schools are organized to educate girls on child marriage, harmful traditional practices, reproductive health, and other life skills. The girls act as peer educators and as a support network for girls trying to escape early marriage or withdrawal from school.

Members frequently report planned early marriages of friends to the head of the girls' club or a women's association representative. The club head reports these events to the school director and women's association and begin the intervention. Judges, administrators, and police at the Woreda level are trained by Amhara Women's Association and [Organization for the Development of Women and Children in Ethiopia \(ODWaCE\)](#) on national legal laws to raise national awareness on early marriage and other harmful traditional practices as violations of girls' and women's rights.

A new long-term strategy has been launched in 2014 on harmful and traditional practices at the federal and country levels. And Save the Children's [EVERY ONE Campaign](#) cascaded this strategy to the Amhara regional State in 2014.

Save the Children Canada

Save the Children Canada is a member of Save the Children International, a network of 29 member organizations raising funds and operating programs domestically and internationally that focus on the issues of health and nutrition, education, HIV and AIDS, child protection, livelihoods and food security, emergency relief and child rights governance.

The approach used by Save the Children Canada in preventing and elimination of CEFM addresses both child protection and gender equality. It is a three-pillar system founded on prevention, protection and empowerment. This system is currently being used in two programmes in Nigeria and Somalia.

Prevention efforts with governments include work dedicated to strengthening existing legislative frameworks for child protection, and improving implementation of these frameworks. Depending on the country context, support is provided to governments to include prevention and elimination of CEFM in legislation, enhance coordination of child protection interventions within and between relevant ministries, and train authorities on CEFM, gender equality and child protection.

Prevention efforts with the community include awareness raising activities with traditional and religious leaders to positively change their perception of CEFM, as well as activities with parents/families to highlight the impacts that CEFM can have on children and the positive potential of children waiting to delay marriage.

Prevention efforts with children target at-risk girls and boys and support child-led initiatives to raise awareness on the consequences of CEFM. Such efforts also engage girls and boys in discussing alternative options to CEFM, and provide life skills training.

Protection efforts target girls and boys who were married early and those at risk. Save the Children trains staff from relevant authorities (such as Child Welfare/Protection Committees or Women's Lobby Groups) on how to identify vulnerable children, how to resolve child protection concerns and how to refer cases for support (case management). Various concerns such as sexual and reproductive health, education, stigma and discrimination, gender-based violence and/or livelihood opportunities are covered by these efforts.

Protection efforts include the provision of gender sensitive sexual and reproductive health services to pregnant girls, alongside medical, legal and psychosocial support for those who are already married as a result of CEFM.

Mobilization at the community and family levels regarding child protection and gender equality works to create a supportive environment for girls and boys to learn, engage and protect and fulfil their rights.

Empowerment efforts mainly target girls and boys who are already married or those who are separated/divorced. Girls and boys are provided with a wide range of opportunities (i.e. education, vocational training, employment, life skills), which enable them to make informed decisions about their future and be active citizens and productive members of their societies.

The question of children already married falls under the second and the third pillar (protection and empowerment), where Save the Children provides support to both

girls and boys who are already married as a result of CEFM. This support encompasses: case management; the provision of gender sensitive sexual and reproductive health services to pregnant girls; the provision of medical, legal and psychosocial support for married girls and boys; and the provision of educational, vocational training and employment opportunities to both married girls and boys.

In each CEFM project there are indicators that have been developed to track changes at the immediate and intermediate levels. It is noteworthy that these indicators are both qualitative and quantitative. Indeed, they are used to track changes in access, knowledge and capacity, as well as changes in perception, attitudes and behaviours. The indicators are all disaggregated by sex and age.

In Somaliland - the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) and the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) are currently developing/finalizing laws that will most likely include provisions to prevent and eliminate CEFM, such as the Child Act, the National Plan of Action for Children, the Family Law, the Sexual Offence Bill and the Child Protection Policy. Through its project on “Prevention of Child, Early and Forced Marriage in Somalia: A Child Protection and Gender Equality Approach”, Save the Children is currently providing technical and financial support to the MoLSA and MoJ to address CEFM via legal frameworks and codes of conduct.

Save the Children Bangladesh

To address the issue of CEFM in Bangladesh, Save the Children is working on preventive measures by ensuring that alert groups are present in communities in cases of CEFM and by working with local communities and calling attention to the issue.

Specifically, Save the Children Bangladesh intends to create a network of 3 “CEFМ whistle blowing” groups across three project areas. The three groups will include female students, youth leaders, teachers, parents, fathers, religious leaders, doctors and community elites, who can, in turn, inform law enforcement agencies and other organisations working on the issue.

Plus, work will be conducted with different components of local communities, as well as children, to talk about CEFM and its consequences. Discussions on these themes will also be conducted with NGOs, local governments and local community groups.

Save the Children Bangladesh has recently launched a new social media campaign named [#LetHerGrow](#) on the issue of CEFM, which uses Facebook posts to

disseminate stories and information on the importance of education and delaying marriage.

Save the Children Nepal

Save the Children in Nepal is addressing the roots of CEFM by implementing programmes related to gender equity in the country. To this end, the pilot project named [CHOICES](#) (a gender-transformative package) targeting very young adolescents (10-14 years old) has been conducted in a region with high prevalence of CEFM.

The CHOICES curriculum engages adolescents in fun, developmentally appropriate dialogues about their notions of respect, communication, fairness and their dreams for the future. The goal of the curriculum is to empower youth and adolescents, through systematic thought reasoning and behaviour change, to challenge the accepted social gender norms in their community.

The main activities for prevention are related to educational activities that explain the consequences of CEFM. Specifically, youngsters are involved in peer-to-peer discussions, role games and scenarios in a view of changing attitudes and behaviours related to gender equity issues.

The results clearly show that Choices was effective in contributing to more gender equitable attitudes and behaviors among boys and girls. The evidence is especially convincing because the data was collected using diverse methods (both qualitative and quantitative) and shows a consistent picture. Statistically significant differences between the results at baseline and endline among the experimental group were seen in scales measuring discrimination, social image, control and dominance, violence and girls' education, gender roles, acceptance of traditional gender norms. The smaller sample of paired siblings, while too small to show statistically significant results, showed a clear trend among the boys in the experimental group to adopt more gender-equitable behaviors after participating in Choices.

More details on the results of the project can be found [here](#).

II. Contact information of CEFM champions

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