

Enlisting the Whole Government to Benefit the Whole Girl: Ending Child, Early, and Forced Marriage

Girls Not Brides USA (GNB USA), the leading US advocacy coalition dedicated to ending child, early and forced marriage, welcomes the Obama Administration's announcement of new initiatives geared toward promoting education and empowerment of adolescent girls, including the whole-of-government initiative Let Girls Learn and the work of the office of Global Women's Issues to develop an Adolescent Girl Strategy that will guide US efforts in this area. Child, early and forced marriage (CEFM) is a violation of numerous fundamental human rights and inhibits the achievement of various US foreign policy goals and must be chief among those issues US foreign policy and assistance seek to tackle in the promotion of girls' education, health and empowerment.

Concrete actions undertaken by the US to advance the rights and empowerment of adolescent girls and end CEFM will make the world a more secure and prosperous place and will ensure that US foreign policy is more effective and efficient at fostering global equality, justice, human rights and development. To that end, we offer some guidance on developing a whole-of-government approach to ending CEFM.¹



Guiding Principles and Vision for Success

Efforts that the United States undertakes to end CEFM should be guided by: a commitment to understanding and addressing the root causes of CEFM; a focus on changing rigid gender norms associated with CEFM; the adoption of a comprehensive and multi-sectoral approach; and a commitment to empowering married girls and addressing their needs.

SUCCESS CAN BE ACHIEVED IF THE US:

- **raises the issue of CEFM in both development programs and diplomatic relations** in and with affected states;
- **increases funding to combat the practice** and targets investments in evidence-based and effective interventions; and improves research, monitoring, and evaluation in this area.

Successful efforts will be **coordinated across the US Government** through an official inter-agency process, with a named leader of the effort who is responsible for ongoing coordination. **An overarching strategy** will feature clear benchmarks for success and relevant indicators against which progress can be measured.

Recommendations: Leveraging US Development Assistance

America's development assistance programs will continue to be crucial to US efforts to end CEFM and in meeting the needs of married girls; ending CEFM will also help to improve development outcomes and leverage US investments in related areas such as health, education, democratic governance and food security. Development efforts should involve work within the following sectors:

- **Global Health:** Development efforts to end CEFM must include a robust focus on health, particularly adolescent sexual and reproductive health—both recommending where and how efforts to end CEFM should be integrated into existing health programs, as well as outlining new areas for specialized CEFM programs.
- **Education:** Keeping girls in school through at least secondary level, and ensuring that they gain a quality, gender-sensitive education in a safe and supportive environment is a crucial CEFM prevention strategy and can help mitigate the negative effects of the practice on already married girls. US foreign assistance investments in education should



include specific targets for CEFM prevention and include comprehensive sexuality education as a key component for both in- and out-of-school girls.

- **Food Security and Nutrition:** CEFM is a driver of malnutrition in both young mothers and infants of young mothers, as well as a result of food insecurity. USAID should include CEFM prevention programs, as well as plans for mitigating against CEFM, in food security and nutrition programs, particularly in times of drought and food scarcity.
- **Humanitarian, Peace and Security programs:** The instabilities caused by conflict and humanitarian crises are drivers of CEFM. US peace and security and humanitarian response offices and programs should be better attuned to the risks and means of mitigating CEFM and addressing the needs of married adolescents in crisis settings.
- **Democracy and Governance:** The US should continue to focus on supporting high prevalence countries to strengthen laws and norms around birth and marriage registration, and to implement existing international legal and human rights frameworks. Also, the US should promote institutional and policy changes that address the root causes of CEFM and promote women's and girls' rights more broadly.
- **Economic Empowerment:** The US should invest in programs that help to offset the economic pressures for families to marry daughters through multiple mechanisms—such as providing a direct incentive for delaying marriage, incentivizing behaviors that are linked with delay of marriage (such as school attendance), or increasing the financial knowledge and skills of girls or other family members that help to increase financial security.

Recommendations: Marshaling US Diplomatic Efforts

US diplomatic efforts also have a strong role to play. Ending CEFM should be a priority consideration in the following:

- **Human Rights Reports:** In 2012, the US State Department made a strategic decision to include CEFM as a reporting requirement in its annual human rights reports. The US Government should standardize the reporting requirements to measure child marriage incidence, girls' secondary education and access to opportunities as part of the broader human rights landscape.
- **Bilateral Strategic Dialogues:** Information gleaned through such mechanisms as the Human Rights Report should be used in bilateral strategic dialogues with high burden countries, marshaling what diplomatic pressure—or incentives—we can to encourage countries to end the practice.
- **Multilateral Leadership:** The US should push for provisions against CEFM in multilateral forums and outcome documents such as the post-2015, sustainable development agenda.



Institutionalization: Ingredients for Success

In order for the US to do what is necessary to end CEFM, efforts will need to be institutionalized throughout US foreign policy, through such activities as:

- **Comprehensive, Whole-of-Government**

Strategy: The State Department's forthcoming Adolescent Girl Strategy should incorporate all relative agencies, sectors and "the whole of the girl," including an explicit focus on ending child marriage.

- **Research and Learning:** Annual reporting on strategy implementation should be required, with reports being made public (or at least have a public version).

- **Leadership and Inter-Agency Coordination:**

The strategy should name a single, inter-agency coordinator who is responsible for the implementation and coordination of the CEFM provisions of the strategy, as well as individual agency leads.

- **Harmonization with Existing Policies:** In order to ensure maximum efficiency and coordination, implementation of the strategy should be undertaken in consultation and coordination with policy leads in relevant areas such as: children in adversity; gender-based violence; women peace and security; and youth in development.
- **Funding:** To the extent possible, development sector interventions described above should have a stated account or line item funding source so that dedicated CEFM programs are developed and implemented and so that the US Government can track the impact of related programs.
- **Full Force of Law:** The whole-of-government Adolescent Girl Strategy should be given the full force of law through enactment of an Executive Order, commensurate with similar Administration strategies on gender-based violence and women, peace and security.

1 A working paper that extensively elaborates on these recommendations is available by contacting one of the Girls Not Brides USA co-chairs listed below.

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Girls Not Brides USA is comprised of more than 50 US-based organizations committed to working together to end child, early, and forced marriage worldwide. Girls Not Brides USA is an affiliate of the Girls Not Brides global partnership, which includes more than 450 civil society organizations from 70 countries.

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