



## Enlisting the Whole Government to Benefit the Whole Girl:

### Ending Child, Early, and Forced Marriage

Child marriage is defined as any formal marriage or informal union where one or both parties are under 18 years of age. Child, or early, marriage affects 15 million girls each year, or 1 girl every 2 seconds. Forced marriage is marriage of a person at any age that occurs without free and full consent of both spouses, and thus necessarily includes child marriage.

Girls Not Brides USA (GNB USA), the premier U.S. advocacy coalition dedicated to ending child, early and forced marriage (CEFM), encourages the U.S. Government to continue and enhance its work to empower adolescent girls by working to end this global problem. CEFM, which is recognized internationally as a violation of numerous fundamental human rights, inhibits the achievement of various U.S. foreign policy goals and undermines girls' development and futures. This practice occurs globally, and is not tied to any one region, culture, religion, or ethnicity.

Concrete actions undertaken by the U.S. 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 American foreign policy is more effective and efficient at fostering global equality, justice, human

rights and development. Ending CEFM and responding to the needs of already married adolescents must be chief among those issues U.S. foreign policy and assistance seek to tackle in the promotion of girls' education, health and empowerment.

To that end, we offer some guidance on implementing a whole-of-government approach to ending CEFM, specifically by utilizing the suite of existing U.S. policies, strategies, and programs already targeted towards adolescent girls' needs. This will particularly necessitate the full funding and implementation of the *U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls* (the Strategy), and the continued work on other crosscutting initiatives, such as the DREAMS program, focused on reducing adolescent girls' exposure to HIV/AIDS, and Let Girls Learn, which complements the Strategy by focusing on overcoming barriers to girls' education, advancement, and development.

**For more information on Girls Not Brides USA or to schedule a consultation, please contact one of the co-chairs:**

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# I. GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND VISION FOR SUCCESS

Efforts the U.S. 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 requires the United States to: **raise the issue of CEFM in both development programs and diplomatic relations** in and with affected states; **increase funding to combat the practice and target investments in evidence-based and effective interventions; and improve research, monitoring, and evaluation** in this area. Successful efforts will be coordinated across the U.S. Government through an official inter-agency process as created in the *U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls*. The implementation of plans included in the *U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls* (the Strategy) should be measured against their benchmarks for success and relevant indicators and be coordinated by a named leader of the effort. Progress against stated objectives in that Strategy should be shared out regularly with civil society in an effort to increase transparency and the sharing of information from organizations conducting programs and research on the ground to those leading the Strategy's implementation efforts. The Strategy must be implemented in its entirety in order to empower adolescent girls and ensure their human rights are respected, protected, and fulfilled. This is particularly necessary for ending CEFM, which is a practice that impacts the entire lives of girls and will only be eradicated with true empowerment and gender equality. For full implementation, the Strategy must be fully funded and executed with an eye towards coordination to related policies and programs (as outlined in Section III).

# II. RECOMMENDATIONS: LEVERAGING U.S. DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

The United States' development assistance programs will continue to be crucial to U.S. efforts to end CEFM and in meeting the needs of married girls; ending CEFM will also help to improve development outcomes and leverage U.S. investments in related areas such as health, education, economic empowerment, and peace and security, democratic governance and food security. Development and humanitarian 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. All women and girls should have agency and access to resources that allow them to plan if, and when, to start a family.

## EDUCATION:

Keeping girls in school through at least the 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 for already married girls. U.S. foreign assistance investments in education should include specific targets for CEFM prevention, integration of already married adolescents, 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 the infants of young mothers, and is 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. U.S. 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 U.S. 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. Where applicable, the U.S. should encourage the enforcement of existing child marriage laws, policies and strategies. Also, the U.S. should promote institutional and policy changes that address the root causes of CEFM and promote women's and girls' rights more broadly.

## ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT:

Families experiencing economic insecurity often feel that marrying their daughters can help to alleviate current hardship. The U.S. should invest in programs that help to offset the economic pressures families experience through multiple mechanisms – such as providing a direct incentive for delaying marriage and incentivizing behaviors that are linked with delay of marriage (such as school attendance). Increasing

the financial knowledge and skills of girls and other family members and ensuring that girls are educated in fields that will lead to employment in adulthood should also be used to help to increase financial security.

### III. RECOMMENDATIONS: MARSHALING U.S. DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS

U.S. 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 U.S. State Department made a strategic decision to include CEFM as a reporting requirement in its annual human rights reports. The U.S. Government must maintain standardized reporting requirements to measure CEFM incidence, girls' secondary education and access to opportunities, and other proxy indicators of girls' empowerment as part of the broader human rights landscape.

#### BILATERAL STRATEGIC DIALOGUES:

Information gleaned through such mechanisms as the Human Rights Report and in-country consultation with civil society should be used in bilateral dialogues with high burden countries, marshaling what diplomatic pressure—or incentives—the U.S. Government can to encourage countries to end the practice.

#### MULTILATERAL LEADERSHIP:

The U.S. should push for provisions against CEFM in multilateral forums and resolutions or outcome documents from arenas such as the Human Rights Council, the UN General Assembly, and reporting on progress on the Sustainable Development Goals, including target 5.3 to eliminate all harmful practices including CEFM.

#### OFFICE OF GLOBAL WOMEN'S ISSUES:

The Office of Global Women's Issues (GWI) at the State Department has often led on mainstreaming gender through policy-creation, programming, training of the diplomatic corps and technical assistance throughout State and with other U.S. Agencies. That the Office is led by an Ambassador-at-Large who reports to the Secretary has been critical in elevating the challenges women and girls face, both within the U.S. Government internally and through diplomacy with other nations. The Office should continue to be led by an Ambassador, report to the Secretary, and coordinate efforts across State Department bureaus and U.S. Agencies. Additionally, through their small grants mechanism, GWI should continue to fund "proof of concept" programs to spur innovative and community-led responses to CEFM and disseminate learnings based on those projects.

### III. INSTITUTIONALIZATION: INGREDIENTS FOR SUCCESS

The United States has been a world leader by creating a suite of policies to respect, protect, and fulfill the human rights of women and girls and ensure their empowerment, including the *U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls*, the *U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence Globally*, the *U.S. Action Plan for Children in Adversity*, *National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security*, the *USAID Youth in Development Policy* and both USAID's and the State Department's respective gender strategies. Specific commitments to end CEFM and address the root causes of gender inequality within those strategies must be implemented and coordinated across the U.S. government in order to impact this harmful practice. For the U.S. to do what is necessary to end CEFM, efforts will need to be institutionalized throughout U.S. foreign policy, through such activities as:

#### IMPLEMENTATION OF THE U.S. GLOBAL STRATEGY TO EMPOWER ADOLESCENT GIRLS

Four agencies (Department of State, USAID, Millennium Challenge Corporation, and Peace Corps) have implementation plans in the Strategy. Those agencies should convene regularly to coordinate programmatic and diplomatic efforts among themselves and work to ensure that holistic, multi-sectoral programming and policies are utilized throughout U.S. Government work for and with adolescent girls. Annual public reporting and consultation with civil society on the implementation of the Strategy's efforts regarding CEFM should be required, with leadership by a named inter-agency coordinator, as well as individual agency leads present alongside relevant civil society members.

#### COORDINATION OF EXISTING STRATEGIES AND EFFORTS:

The *U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence Globally* lists CEFM as a form of gender-based violence, as well as often serving as a pre-cursor to other forms of sustained, even life-long, GBV including intimate partner violence and assault. This includes intimate partner violence and sexual assault. To successfully prevent and respond to GBV, the U.S. Government must consistently work to end CEFM, while also tackling the shared underlying factor that leads to CEFM and other forms of GBV – gender inequality. The GBV Strategy defines GBV as inclusive of CEFM and commits to fighting CEFM through programs, enhanced data collection and analysis, and increased collaboration amongst State and USAID.

# SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE COORDINATION OF EXISTING STRATEGIES & EFFORTS

- **USAID's Child, Early and Forced Marriage Resource Guide:** USAID should hold regular trainings on this resource guide for all HQ and Mission staff that work with high-prevalence countries. The guide has helpful M&E indicators and relevant materials that are sector-specific across all of USAID's areas of work.
- **USAID Vision for Action on Child Marriage:** This document provides guidance to USAID staff on how to best combat child marriage and address the needs of those who are already married. This should also be required reading for desk and Mission staff overseeing USAID work in high-prevalence countries.
- **State Department Foreign Affairs Manual and Handbook:** The State Department Foreign Affairs Manual and Handbook (FAM) has several sections on CEFM, including what individuals at Posts and Headquarters can do to prevent CEFM and respond to a marriage after it has occurred. This guidance also offers strategies for engaging local partners to prevent and respond to CEFM.
- **Foreign Service Institute (FSI) Gender Training:** CEFM prevalence and impacts, prevention and response, as well as the U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls, should be permanently integrated into FSI courses on gender and these courses should be made part of the mandatory

coursework for Foreign Service Officers (FSOs). The Gender 101 course is often the only training many FSOs have on a broad range of gender subjects.

- **PEPFAR DREAMS:** With the ambitious goal of reducing adolescent HIV/AIDS in ten Sub-Saharan African countries by 40%, DREAMS is a key piece of targeted interventions for adolescent girls, and should continue to be fully funded and implemented. The DREAMS initiative is meant to ensure evidence-based, holistic programs are used to drive the HIV/AIDS response for adolescent girls and young women, which is one of the populations with the highest rates of new infection.
- **Let Girls Learn:** Education is a key strategy for reducing CEFM and improving the lives of already married adolescents. This initiative brings together the Department of State, USAID, Peace Corps, the U.S. Department of Labor, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and MCC to address the range of barriers preventing adolescent girls from attaining a quality education, including cultural factors such as unequal gender norms, and should continue to be fully funded and implemented.
- **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 U.S. Government can track the impact of related programs.

## ABOUT GNB USA

Girls Not Brides USA is comprised of more than 50 U.S.-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 700 civil society organizations in over 70 countries.

For more information please visit [www.girlsnotbrides.org](http://www.girlsnotbrides.org) or contact:

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