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[Preventing Child Marriage](#)

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By [ONE Partners](#)

Here's a guest post about child marriage from our [partners](#) at [CARE](#).



Last week on Capitol Hill, I joined Paul Barker, CARE's Country Director of Tanzania, as he spoke to legislators about the problem of child marriage in Tanzania. It is estimated that over the next decade, more than 100 million girls in the developing world will be married before they are 18. The millions of girls who become child brides face daunting odds: they are less likely to finish school, have fewer economic opportunities and face a multitude of health problems, including premature pregnancy, complications in childbirth and a high risk of physical and sexual abuse from husbands and in-laws. But beyond this overwhelming statistic, there are individual stories, too, which help convey both the tragedy and the hope surrounding the issue of child marriage.

One such story is that of Mukeshwari. She was 15 years old and living with her grandfather in an isolated village in India when he arranged for her to marry to a man in a

neighboring village. Child marriage is common in India, where close to 50% of girls are married before they are 18.

Fortunately Mukeshwari's story ends well. With the support of a CARE trained volunteer health worker, her situation was brought to the attention of the village council. They voted to stop the marriage, in line with India's marriage age law. The case also inspired the village to form a committee on early marriage, which now works with the families of adolescent girls in the village to discourage the practice.

Mukeshwari's story is inspiring, but it also provides valuable lessons on some of the actions needed to address the problem of child marriage. This includes support for community-based mechanisms and programs for girls and their families. US policy makers have a chance to support such solutions by passing the International Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act. This legislation, which has been introduced in the U.S. Congress, requires the President to develop a multi-year strategy to help prevent child marriage in developing countries. It also requires the Department of State to address child marriage in its annual Human Rights Report, to integrate child marriage prevention strategies throughout U.S. foreign policy initiatives, and to scale up successful approaches to prevent child marriage.

The time is now for leadership from Congress on this issue—on behalf of Mukeshwari and girls just like her around the world. Policymakers have to make difficult decisions every day. Passing this legislation should not be one of them. [Ask your representatives](#) today to co-sponsor the International Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act of 2009.

-Erin Kennedy, Policy Advocate, CARE USA

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