



**CARE International position on Child, Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM)
and the Girl Summit, July 2014**

CARE International welcomes the convening of a Girl Summit in London on 22nd July 2014. As an organization dedicated to promoting girls' rights and tackling child, early and forced marriage (CEFM) globally, CARE believes that the summit should result in concrete and actionable political, program and financial commitments from governments, donors, civil society and other stakeholders in order to have a meaningful impact in the lives of adolescent girls. In particular, CARE International calls on all Summit stakeholders to commit to:

1. Support and expand policies and programs that address the root causes of CEFM

The root causes of CEFM vary across contexts but are often associated with social norms around gender and sexuality, cultural and religious practices, and the lack of social, educational and livelihood opportunities for women and girls. Governments and donors must tackle root causes by leveraging and expanding their efforts in areas such as education (for example, expanding policies and programs supporting accessible and quality schooling for girls through secondary level,); health (through safe and accessible sexual and reproductive health programs and services for adolescent girls, including provision of family planning services to ensure both prevention and mitigation of the effects of CEFM); and poverty reduction (through provision of life skills, vocational training, and livelihood programs for adolescent girls and their families). In addition to the passage of minimum age of marriage laws, governments should also strengthen broader policies, institutions and systems that promote girls and women's rights, including providing funding and capacity building for policy implementation among responsible actors, including civil registrars, religious and community leaders, teachers and health workers.

2. Support civil society and community-based initiatives to address the norms driving CEFM

While policies and strategies at national level are important, tackling CEFM requires efforts to address the social norms driving the practice at the community and wider societal levels. Without this, policy implementation will fail. CEFM is often underpinned by rigid gender norms and expectations that constrain girls and women's roles, value and choices, and maintain unequal gender relations in the family and society. Particular support from governments and donors is needed for programs, particularly at community level, that incorporate approaches to support girls and women, and engage men and boys, community leaders and other stakeholders, to transform inequitable social norms and expectations, including norms and attitudes around core issues such as gender roles, girls sexuality and practices such as dowry and bride price.

3. Empower married girls and address their needs

Due to their status, married girls occupy a difficult and neglected position within society and are often invisible in public policy and programming. Dedicated and well-resourced efforts are needed to address the unique circumstances and needs of married girls and mitigate the negative effects of child, early and forced marriage. Programs should provide safe social platforms for married girls to access peer support, receive critical information and services (including on sexual and reproductive health, contraception, maternal health, and HIV/AIDS), continue education, develop life skills, engage in livelihood programs and access justice.

4. Adopt and implement comprehensive national strategies or action plans on CEFM to promote multi-sectoral coordination and government accountability.

Since the root causes and solutions to CEFM are embedded in a range of sectors (e.g. health, education, livelihoods, justice) – an integrated and holistic response is needed across these various sectors to promote greater synergy and maximize impact. States should commit to elevating the issue of CEFM on their national agenda, by developing and implementing CEFM national strategies and action plans and link them to wider efforts to address gender equality, GBV and related issues. Such plans should provide a framework for multi-sectoral coordination and accountability (including on commitments made at the summit), backed by sufficient funding to scale-up good practices and address gaps. Experience suggests that the coordinating body for cross-government efforts on CEFM should be housed in a ministry or office with adequate power and resources to ensure strong coordination and accountability.

5. Improve collection, analysis, and use of data and research to enhance child marriage prevention and response efforts

Local and national information and data systems should be strengthened to effectively track CEFM and related factors that drive the practice, including identifying specific regions and populations with high prevalence, and girls at high risk. Such systems need to be capable of linking and analyzing the correlation of child marriage indicators with other indicators, including educational attainment or performance, age of first pregnancy and first birth, maternal and child health, gender-based violence, income and employment. Further, it is critical to move beyond a focus on age of marriage as the sole most important indicator for child marriage, as this does not illuminate the underlying realities that lead to CEFM. There is need for greater investment in the development of new indicators and measurement tools that can monitor and evaluate social change processes related to the drivers of CEFM, especially in relation to shifts in social norms surrounding the value of girls and their roles during adolescence.

6. Prioritize CEFM as a specific target within the post-2015 development agenda.

Child marriage is a global problem and has multiple reinforcing impacts across a range of development goals. As such, tackling CEFM is critical to achieving positive outcomes on education, health, nutrition, and other global development issues. Subsuming CEFM under a more general target on violence against women risks masking the complex nature of this practice and the comprehensive strategies required to address it. For these reasons, CEFM should be integrated into the global post-2015 development-framework as a specific target under the proposed goal on gender equality. Doing so would enable targeted action on CEFM and strengthen wider efforts to end gender-based violence and promote gender equality. States should also look to other processes over the coming year and beyond to build global consensus on the need to end CEFM, such as through promoting the adoption of a substantive resolution on CEFM at the 2014 UN General Assembly.

About CARE International: CARE International fights poverty and injustice in more than 80 countries around the world to help the world's poorest people find routes out of poverty. We also deliver emergency aid to survivors of war and natural disasters, and help people rebuild their lives in the aftermath. At the time of the summit, CARE will announce its own commitments to support wider efforts on CEFM, which include allocating 6.6 million USD over the next three years to address the root causes of child marriage globally, and more detailed plans to support local efforts on child marriage in 16 sub-districts of Nepal and 90 villages of Bangladesh. For more information on CARE International's programmes addressing CEFM, please visit:

<http://www.care.org/our-work/womens-empowerment/child-marriage/child-marriage-causes>

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