



## Faith-Inspired Initiatives to Tackle the Social Determinants of Child Marriage

Azza Karam

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# FAITH-INSPIRED INITIATIVES TO TACKLE THE SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF CHILD MARRIAGE

By Azza Karam

A recent UNFPA (2012) report presents data on child marriage, including the correlates of the practice and its consequences. The report comments on the general situation of child marriage and provides detailed country profiles on 10 countries where child marriage is most prevalent. Though it does not cover programs to address child marriage, the report does offer a number of general recommendations, including: first, use data to identify and target geographic “hotspots” with high proportions and numbers of girls at risk of child marriage; second, focus on addressing the root causes underlying marriage in a given setting; and third, mitigate the harmful impact of child marriage on married girls.

This article looks at some of the root causes underlying child marriage through the prism of social determinants, and the role that faith-based and faith-inspired initiatives could play in ending the practice. The article begins by focusing on social determinants and incumbent socio-cultural norms, given that social determinants are the conditions in which people are born, grow up, live, work, and age. These conditions influence a person’s opportunity to be healthy, educated, the extent of their wealth, even where they live, and the influence they may have in their lives and careers.

Social determinants are both a factor in, as well as a result of, inequities in access and realization of human rights. Various social factors impact on conditions for health and development. Some of the more common of those relevant to the issue of child marriage are social inclusion (or exclusion), and social and cultural norms—which include religion. Next, the article examines how and why faith matters by looking at instances of how governments themselves involve faith-based organizations (FBOs), as well as citing the work of some of the FBOs in dealing with the issues of child marriage. A half dozen examples of FBOs dealing with the issues are provided.

## Social Inclusion and Social Norms

Social inclusion, which refers to the social connectedness and cohesion of the community,

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**Azza Karam**, Ph.D., serves as a Senior Advisor on Culture at the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). She has published widely. Her books include *Religion and Development Past 2015* (2014: UNFPA); *Religion, Development and the United Nations* (NY: SSRC, 2012), *Transnational Political Islam* (Pluto, 2004), *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers* (IIDEA: 2004); *A Woman’s Place: Religious Women as Public Actors* (WCRP: 2002); and *Women, Islamisms and the State: Contemporary Feminisms in Egypt* (Macmillan/Palgrave, 1998).

has been shown to have a direct relationship to good health and lower mortality rates, and to include factors that encourage civic participation in changing conditions that affect group goals. If and when a group or community goal is to eradicate a harmful practice—such as early, forced, or child marriage—then the extent of the connectedness and cohesion among that community will determine, to some extent, the rate of success in mobilization towards achievement of that objective. On the other hand, social exclusion can be the result of prejudices (including those based on racial, ethnic, religious, or gender dynamics), which in turn results in diverging access to health care, education, as well as other social, legal, and even political services. Marrying girls under 18 years old is rooted in gender discrimination, encouraging premature and continuous child bearing and giving preference to boys' education. Child marriage is also a strategy for economic survival as families marry off their daughters at an early age to reduce their economic burden.

Social norms are shaped by—and in turn, influence—the acceptance of particular behaviors or practices. In the same way that, say, alcohol abuse, spousal violence, or early marriage of boys and girls may be an accepted part of the culture of a community, then many more people will adopt it than in a community where it is frowned upon. Where prevalent, child marriage functions as a social norm.

There are many elements of culture that might have a bearing on social inclusion, efficacy, and income inequality. Gender roles in different cultures lead to differences in opportunities for men and women, and to disparities in nutrition, health, education, access to public office, as well as life opportunities for their offspring. Therefore attitudes towards mainstream culture can influence everything from medical care to whether or not marrying children before the age of 18 is deemed permissible and/or commonplace. This, in turn, affects the type and amount of healthcare received, the sense of connectedness within a community, and many other factors, including the extent to which legislation to eradicate certain harmful practices is enacted and effectively implemented by communities.

Addressing child marriage requires recognition of the various factors that contribute to the perpetuation of the practice. These include economic factors (e.g. the need to support many children, paying a lower dowry), structural factors (e.g. lack of educational opportunities), and social factors (e.g. sense of tradition and social obligation, risk of pregnancy out of wedlock, avoiding criticism whereby older unmarried girls may be considered impure, and the belief in some communities that religion encourages marriage as of puberty).

Once girls are married, their status infringes upon a range of their rights. Most child brides are burdened with responsibilities as wives and mothers with little support, resources, or life experience to meet these challenges. Compared to their unmarried peers or to older women, girls who marry before the age of 18 are likely to have lower educational attainment, greater chances of experiencing unwanted pregnancies, and are at greater risk of sexual and reproductive health morbidities and maternal mortality. They go into marriage at a disadvantage with regard to their husbands, who tend to be older and to have more experience of school, work, and often, previous relationships. Other harmful consequences may include exposure to HIV infection, violence in the home, and limited freedom to interact with their peers or to participate in civic and cultural activities in their communities.

Child marriage is also a uniquely challenging impediment to development. The cumulative effects of reduced school attainment, maternal morbidities and mortality, and the long-term impact of early marriage and childbearing on children are well documented. The impact on population momentum of over 14 million girls marrying each year and directly having children, often closely spaced, is also important. The pressures to have one child after another are especially great in settings where son preference is common and girls must produce not only children but sons. Investing in girls through adolescence provides opportunities for several demographic returns: reducing population momentum by delaying marriage and childbearing, thereby increasing the space between generations; lowering desired family size

as more educationally accomplished girls are less reliant on multiple children for security; and decreasing the age and power differential between partners, thus positively affecting women's ability to meet their fertility goals. As noted earlier, benefits also extend to the next generation as later marriage is associated with more decision-making for women and often with higher investments in the education and health of children, thereby establishing a virtuous cycle of improved health and education (Green 2014).

## Solutions to End Child Marriage

Most programs focus at three levels—working with girls, the people around them, and the legal system and policies that affect their lives. Program scans reveal an overall focus on prevention, thus leaving married girls largely overlooked, despite their pressing needs and concerns. A review by researchers at the International Center for Research on Women (2011) shows the value of addressing multiple levels of social determinants. The research evaluated program strategies for preventing child marriage into five categories: empowering girls at risk of early marriage with programs to reduce girls' social isolation (thus providing the girls with information, safe spaces, skills, and support networks); enhancing their access to school as well as improving the quality of that education; offering economic support and incentives for girls and families (including unconditional cash transfers to parents who delay marriages of their daughters); fostering an enabling legal and political environment; and educating and mobilizing parents and community members. The review argues that such programs aspire to delay the age of marriage by educating and mobilizing parents and communities—those who decide when and whom girls will marry—to change social norms relating to expectations of girls and their marriage prospects.

Parental and community engagement is a frequently used strategy. The primary motivation behind this strategy to “create an enabling environment” is the understanding that the decision to marry girls early is generally in the hands of family and community elders, and that the resulting stigma and sanctions for failing to

meet social expectations are administered by the broader community. Girls rarely have the power or agency to decide on their own if, when, or whom to marry. Thus, parental education and community mobilization attempt to change social norms and forge a more supportive, less punitive environment for girls and families who are willing and ready to change the custom of early marriage. Enlisting parents and community members helps to mitigate possible unintended consequences of girls' participation in programs, and also reinforces a program's messages and activities.

Programs employing this strategy include a range of interventions, including one-on-one meetings with parents and community and religious leaders to gain support; group and community education sessions on the consequences of and alternatives to child marriage; parental and adult committees and forums as guides to life skills and sexual and reproductive health curricula; information, education, and communication campaigns—using various platforms—to convey messages about child marriage, schooling, rights, reproductive health, and other topics; and public announcements and pledges by influential leaders, family heads, and community members.

This type of strategy is generally implemented as an accompaniment to others, and it continues to be challenging to assess the extent to which community education and mobilization efforts contribute to program failure or success, because most evaluations are not designed to isolate the impact of this component. At the same time, it can well be argued that it would be impossible to implement programs aimed at such significant social change without actively engaging community members.

The power of community mobilization is demonstrated through the relatively few programs which have taken on this form of engagement as their core activity, such as the Integrated Action on Poverty and Early Marriage program in Yemen (which sponsored a campaign to raise awareness of parents, grandparents, and youth about the consequences of early marriage) wherein advocacy efforts were instrumental in the introduction of a minimum legal age of marriage. The approach implemented in Senegal by the

Tostan NGO (discussed more below) which does not focus on legal change, is instead built around informal community education and awareness-raising that facilitates community mobilization, sometimes in the form of public declarations against harmful practices, such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and early marriage. Still, it is important to note that Tostan boasts a large number of converted communities through documented pledges but finds less conclusive results on actual declines in child marriage.

### A Role for Faith and FBOs

The focus on social determinants mandates a comprehensive approach to investing in child marriage programming. Current programs that engage community gatekeepers to shift norms tend to focus largely on attitudinal changes. However, while critical to prevention efforts, changed attitudes regarding child marriage often do not automatically translate into changes in parental or community practices, unless and until such mobilization has taken religious teachings, actors, and contexts into account.

Religion can have profound effects on both health and development issues. Child marriages occur most often in patriarchal societies where parents and elders have a significant role in selecting spouses for their children and new brides are absorbed into their new families as domestic help. Girls are often married shortly after puberty to maximize their childbearing potential.

Many cultures place an emphasis on girls' virginity, which is closely tied to a family's honor. Parents may marry off a daughter at an early age to ensure that she marries as a virgin and to prevent out-of-wedlock births. In northeast and sub-Saharan Africa as well as parts of the Middle East, child marriage frequently occurs shortly after FGM, a practice that is often justified as promoting virginity and deterring sexual assault.

People of various religions and sects support early marriage, which is contentious within many religious communities. In Ethiopia, for instance, child marriage is embedded in the customs of Orthodox Christian communities like those in the Amhara region, even though the country's Orthodox Church opposes the practice.

Some Muslims who follow a conservative interpretation of shari'a argue that Islam permits child marriage, as the Qur'an specifies that girls can be married upon reaching maturity, which conservative scholars define as puberty. However, there is debate within Islam about the age at which a girl reaches maturity. Many Muslim communities and Islamic scholars agree with the internationally recognized age of maturity, 18. Moreover, many Muslims argue against child marriage because Islam mandates that men and women should choose their partners freely, and children are unable to do so.

Apart from the role of faith leaders, there is also a role for FBOs in programs to end child marriage. FBOs include religious institutions, religious leaders (male and female), faith-affiliated and faith-inspired service delivery mechanisms, government-sponsored faith-based service partners, government-affiliated faith-based advocates, and international FBOs with local offices. They are often tightly embedded in local communities. In order to focus the lenses on communities, this kaleidoscope must be appreciated.

There is much to be learned about the role of FBOs in development, especially in service provision. Estimates of the role of FBOs in service delivery vary considerably. It has been suggested in a number of studies that FBOs are responsible for 30 to 40 percent of basic healthcare in the world. This figure was challenged by more detailed research published by this journal (see Olivier and Wodon 2014 for health, and Wodon 2014 for education). However, it is clear that the role of FBOs remains important, especially where conflicts and/or humanitarian emergencies are active (IMA World Health 2009; Chand and Patterson 2007).

Beyond service delivery, religious institutions are capable of significant social mobilization, in addition to having a distinct moral standing. Beyond the convening capacities inherent in raising and utilizing legions of volunteers (which no other institution can boast worldwide), they are owners of the longest standing and most enduring mechanisms for raising financial resources. In times when traditional "secular" development is confronting its strongest set of

resource challenges, religious institutions' capabilities should not be underestimated.

FBOs are shaped by many characteristics: theology, size, location, areas of interest, positions on diverse development-related issues and priorities, geo-political positions, regional, national, and local activities, and many more. Some organizations such as World Vision, World Lutheran Relief, or the FBOs associated with the Catholic Church are large. At the same time, small organizations matter too, as "USD 100 can go a very long way to provide basic needs," as pointed out by Nigerian Sister Ngozi who oversees orphanages and women's empowerment initiatives in rural Nigeria (Karam 2014). Given the realities of integration into communities, service provision, resource capacity, political presence as well as the potential of such organizations to act as social and cultural gatekeepers, the work of some of the development FBOs is part of the realm of social determinants. As such, the engagement of and with FBOs around child marriage is illustrative.

In its Working Document (2012) the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children notes that nearly 80 percent of the people in the world profess a religious belief and the vast majority of these faithful belong to an organized religion. This means "that religious leaders are uniquely positioned as moral voices to lead a call to end violence against children" (1). The World Day of Prayer and Action for Children itself is engaged with promoting universal birth registration, encouraging positive parenting, and campaigning against violent child discipline, as well as calling for the end of child marriage. Religious communities, they maintain, can play a central role in ensuring that children grow up in an environment free from child marriage. In advocating for and providing detailed guidance to religious leaders as to their involvement around issues of child marriage, they are urged to lend moral authority to campaigns to end child marriage and advocate for changes in policy and legislation to protect children as well as support families who are struggling in the face of adversity.

## USAID: An "All-of-Government" Approach

The United States is taking a "whole-of-government" social determinants approach to addressing the issue of child, early, and forced marriages (CEFM). It has committed \$5.3 million to preventing CEFM in regions, countries, and communities where interventions are deemed most needed and with highest likelihood of achieving results. US Congressional leaders have also recognized the importance of these efforts, and the US Agency for International Development (USAID) works alongside lawmakers to increase US support to expand efforts to prevent CEFM. The commitments demonstrate the concerted implementation of the US Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally, and the USAID Vision for Action to End Child Marriage and Meet the Needs of Married Children. True to the nature of a social determinants approach, CEFM projects are integrated into sector-specific programs such as health or education to enhance impact.

Since CEFM is strongly linked to educational outcomes, the United States also supports several projects aimed at keeping adolescent girls in school. Let Girls Learn is a social media and public outreach campaign designed to engage the global community and raise awareness on the importance of educating and investing in girls. The commitment in this program includes partnering closely with civil society, including FBOs, to design and implement a strong response.

Moreover, the Department of State includes CEFM as a reporting requirement in its Annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices. In addition to co-sponsoring resolutions on ending CEFM at the Human Rights Council and in the UN General Assembly's Third Committee, the Department of State and the USAID support international and non-governmental organizations that are working to reduce the incidence of CEFM, including projects focused on increasing community awareness—with an emphasis on FBOs—around the legal provisions against CEFM. USAID is investing in both research to expand knowledge about effective

interventions to prevent CEFM and programs to address the needs of married adolescents in regions where the practice is most prevalent. For example, in Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Burkina Faso, USAID is funding a study on effective community-based approaches to prevent CEFM. In Bangladesh, Nepal, and Yemen, USAID is working to reduce the prevalence of CEFM by addressing the legal, social, and economic drivers of the practice. The Department of State and USAID have launched a new program in Benin specifically intended to raise community awareness, including a deliberate outreach to FBOs. The program aims to provide education about the harmful effects of the practice, raise awareness of the law prohibiting forced marriage, and establish “one-stop” gender-based violence (GBV) care centers to provide medical, legal, psychosocial, and economic support to survivors of GBV, including married children.

### World Vision International<sup>1</sup>

In Bangladesh, World Vision has established gender task forces in communities where early marriage is contributing to divorce, domestic abuse, polygamy, human trafficking, population growth, and poor literacy levels. These gender task forces are described as transforming lives at the grassroots level through community awareness and education programs, including direct interventions and consultations with parents in cases where child marriages are planned. In related work, World Vision Bangladesh has been conducting reproductive health education in rural areas where child marriage is most prevalent. The program focuses on creating the conditions necessary for preventing maternal death and disability through access to good ante-natal care, training in safe birth practices and emergency obstetric and post-natal care, along with services related to GBV. Also provided are family planning services that focus on the prevention of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.

World Vision children’s clubs throughout India provide a safe environment for children to learn about their rights and discuss issues that affect them. Each club is run by officers elected by the children. Many of the clubs hold a Children’s

Parliament every month, allowing children to discuss the issues they face—including child marriage—and ways to overcome them. The Parliament also teaches children about democracy and helps them to build leadership skills. In one community in Rajasthan this past year, children’s club members actively stopped four child marriages by talking to parents.

At self-help groups sponsored by World Vision in India and other countries, women meet regularly and are trained in areas including health and HIV, child marriage, and financial and entrepreneurial skills. They learn to save money and form cooperative arrangements in order to make investments in children’s education and other important areas, and to support one another in times of need. These groups are small voluntary associations of people, usually from the same socio-economic background. Through them, many women who married at young ages find strength and unity to face obstacles. In some cases, self-help groups have advocated locally for young victims of marital abuse and sought legal redress on behalf of girls and women.

In India, it has been shown that World Vision education programs reduce the frequency of early marriage when barriers to girls’ education are addressed along with dowry issues. The same pattern has been observed by World Vision staff in Guatemala, Thailand, and Mali.

Uneducated girls have few alternatives for their future because they often lack the life skills and self-confidence to be economically independent. Ignorance of rights, skills, and health matters typically deprives young wives of decision-making power and makes them vulnerable to violence and abuse. World Vision’s Sexual and Gender-Based Violence program deals with the prevention of and response to related problems in refugee communities. It functions through networking among community service staff employed in the camp and the project’s Tanzanian staff to deal with rape, sexual harassment, forced and early marriages, domestic abuse, and other forms of GBV.

In Chad and many other countries, World Vision and partner organizations tackle the issue of early marriage through approaches including village-based awareness workshops that address

children's rights and needs with regard to health, education, early marriage, and other issues. These workshops deal with "taboo" topics that are harming communities and allow women and girls to speak freely in a comfortable and safe environment about problems affecting them. In addition, social workers follow up with married girls in their homes and help ensure children have birth certificates, which facilitates enrollment in school and serves as an example in the area.

In landlocked Niger, which has the second-highest rate of under-18 marriage in the world, humanitarian development workers are struggling against long-standing traditions and desperate poverty to turn the tide towards later marriage and childbearing. Promoting school enrollment for girls is high among priorities, although drop-out rates for girls ages 12–14 are still high due to marriage at those ages.

World Vision also works to reduce vulnerabilities after early marriage for the sake of the children of young wives. Thus for instance, across 32 villages in the Tillaberi district of southwestern Niger, on the banks of the Isa River, World Vision's Girl Rights Project has worked for three years to promote rights and educate girls and women as well as sensitize boys and men to women's needs and rights. This project includes a micro-credit component that enables women to build small businesses and increase their incomes, an important intervention in a zone where erratic weather has led to a shortfall in local rice and millet crops in 9 of the last 10 years. The creation of opportunities for women is resulting in transformation in the local community. For example, in the 22 village clusters around Tera in southwestern Niger, some 355 women have received micro loans and taken up training in creating small enterprises.

Financial assistance and training in job skills and household economics through micro-lending programs incorporated into development work are helping alleviate the strain of extreme poverty in communities in many countries with high early marriage rates. VisionFund International, a World Vision-affiliated organization, manages microfinance institutions that provide loans and training to nearly 500,000 clients in 47 countries. Most of these clients are women. This holistic

approach helps the enterprising poor make sustainable improvements for their families and communities. As of June 2007, Vision Fund International's loan portfolio of \$249 million was impacting the lives of an estimated 1.2 million children. With a client repayment rate of over 98 percent, micro loans are proving to be a sustainable, effective model for reducing poverty and creating lasting change. Over time, this improves the lives of women who have married early, and has in some cases diminished the perceived financial need to send daughters into marriage early.

### GHR Foundation in Kenya

In many of Kenya's coastal cities, child marriage, early pregnancy, FGM, and sex tourism are common—limiting young women's potential and the long-term prosperity of communities. GHR Foundation, a Catholic organization which describes itself as "applying entrepreneurial creativity and universal catholic values to foster hope and opportunity where it is needed most," responds to the data they quote wherein 42 percent of girls in coastal regions of Kenya are married before the age of 15; and more than 40 percent have their first child by age 18. The Foundation's Inter-Religious Action Initiative, Catholic Relief Services, and Kenya's Coast Interfaith Council of Clerics have worked to improve development outcomes by engaging clerics and multi-faith communities to tackle early marriage together.

GHR has funded efforts to empower Christian, Muslim, and Traditional leaders to work with schools, government agencies, and other stakeholders to increase child protection and reduce child marriage. The project is focused on training boys and girls to advocate against child marriage in their communities; working with communities to adopt religious and traditional values and practices that reduce child marriage; improving implementation of policies and laws that prevent child marriage; and, with a view to sustainability beyond the period of funding, mobilizing local religious leadership to ensure the project will be locally owned long-term.



The progress to date, according to GHR, is that more than 1,000 children have been trained on their rights and responsibilities through school peace clubs. These groups have become forums for reporting potential child protection concerns. Moreover, clerics and community advocates have begun to address child marriage, at times with inter-faith approaches, ensuring that girls are returned to school, and providing counseling to families.

### Tostan in Senegal

Tostan, an international nongovernmental organization based in Senegal, uses a combination of nonformal education and social mobilization to advance its goal of empowering communities and reducing the practices of child marriage as well as FGM. Local facilitators teach education sessions which include child marriage-related issues such as sexually transmitted infections, AIDS, birth control, and birth spacing. Those who take part in the education program pass on their new knowledge to the rest of the community as well as to other villages through inter-village meetings. Public discussions are held with the community to seek its support in denouncing harmful practices, including early marriage. The program also taps into African tradition—dance, poetry, theater, and song—to convey messages and gain the buy-in of stakeholders, including girls who may be targeted for early marriage and people who have influence over those decisions.

Tostan's model for peaceful social change is based on the belief that communities themselves must consciously and actively pursue the process of change from within. The program was able to bring about change in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors in 90 intervention villages, and these were reinforced by a public declaration by approximately 300 villages against child marriage and FGM.

### Institute for Health Management Pachod in India

In the Aurangabad area of Maharashtra, India, girls typically married early, usually around age 14, and early childbearing followed shortly afterward. The Institute for Health Management,

Pachod (IHMP) was concerned with the ill effects this had on girls' empowerment, maternal health, and ultimately family health and well-being. In response, they started year-long life skills programs for unmarried 11- to 17-year-old girls. IHMP worked closely with parents and leaders, and involved religious leaders and religious community-based organizations in all aspects of the program. The life skills course also included individual projects carried out in the communities, local recruitment of teachers, and regular and planned meetings with parents. In the planning phase, mothers reported that it would be easier for them to overcome the social pressure to get their daughters married early if their daughters were in school. However, formal education beyond basic education was unavailable in the communities, and they welcomed the life skills program as an alternative. After only one year of the program, age at marriage in the area increased from 16 to 17 years (Pande et al. 2006). This increase was a community-level result, not just among girls participating in the life skills classes themselves, a tribute to how the communities as a whole were mobilized to change the social norm around the age at marriage.

### End Child Marriage Programme in Ethiopia

The approach of the End Child Marriage Programme (ECMP) is to empower all community stakeholders to become partners and change agents in addressing the complex issues around child marriage. They describe their approach as holistic and multi-dimensional, focusing on those at highest risk from child marriage. Their strategy is aimed at scaling-up a sustainable end to child marriage programs nationwide. ECMP attempts to foster community conversations and other efforts which, over time, aim to have communities begin to question child marriage and collectively decide to end the practice.

Working with the Ethiopian Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs, and seeking to engage communities at all levels through participatory training with the various stakeholders, ECMP also works with economic

incentives to provide school materials to help keep girls in school and enable out-of-school girls to re-enroll. Additionally, ECMP offers a revolving fund that supports girls' caregivers with training for income generating activities and with loans through membership of local Savings and Credit Cooperatives.

ECMP's community forums for ending child marriage bring together representatives from all groups trained by them in two districts to share best practices and discuss challenges. Their report highlights their own learning that many individuals taking part in the campaign to end child marriage are experiencing positive change. Reflecting on their engagement, ECMP notes that communities must understand the causes and consequences of child marriage and how to end it.

## Conclusion

Current programs are contributing to delaying marriage among specific populations, but are insufficient for ending the practice—at least not in the near future. Less attention is being paid to mitigating the impact of child marriage in the lives of girls, and to making the case at the highest levels so that child marriage comes to be seen as an important hindrance to development.

Social determinants complete the current frame of developmental interventions to end child marriage. While more effort was devoted in the past to education, income, legal, and policy frameworks, it is increasingly clear that engaging communities in social norm and cultural change is no longer a matter of choice, but rather of necessity. Evidence to date highlights the fact that working with religious actors, and FBOs in

particular, offers multiple entry points for building current efforts. Not least among these is the capacity of such interventions to address not only prevention of the practice, but also the impact on young married girls—a feature which remains relatively overlooked in more mainstream programming. Engaging with faith actors provides an opportunity simultaneously for a “whole of government” as well as a “whole of social determinants” approach.

Yet, such faith-centric efforts, so to speak, still operate in relative isolation and remain less funded by mainstream secular development actors focused on “social norm and behavioral change” programs. This is reflective of a dominant policy reality in international development, which tends to see religion in general, and faith-based actors in particular, as marginal to other social determinants. This further highlights a need for better communication to share lessons learned, and to improve the efficiency of interventions. In addition, few programs are evaluating the impact of their

interventions, suggesting a clear role for assessing the funding as well as the modalities of program evaluations.

Given ongoing geo-political realities, faith-related endeavors are, if anything, becoming more prominent in today's developmental landscape. There is no doubt that religious arguments are part of the problems that perpetuate harmful practices such as early, forced, and child marriages. In order to realize the human rights in question, religious actors must be among the most prominent parts of the solution.




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1. Portions of this section were adapted from World Vision (2008).

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