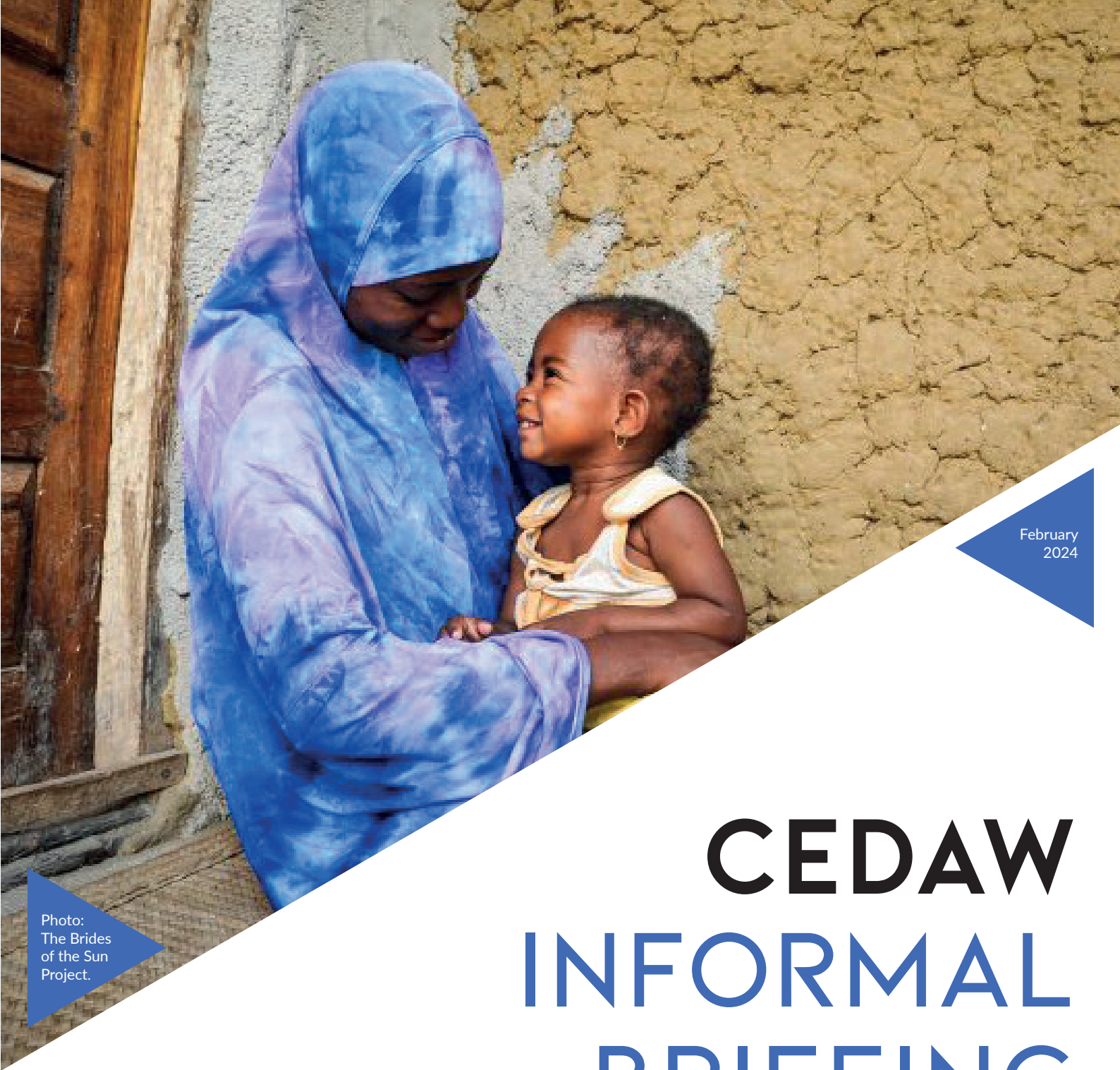




February
2024

Photo:
The Brides
of the Sun
Project.

CEDAW INFORMAL BRIEFING

THE NEXUS BETWEEN
CLIMATE CHANGE AND
CHILD MARRIAGE

Evidence for the Nexus Between Climate Change and Child Marriage

CEDAW Informal Briefing, 5th February 2024, UN Geneva

Mohinder Watson, PhD MPH
Founder, Action on Child, Early and Forced Marriage
UN Geneva Representative, International Council of Women

The Context

Child, early and forced marriage of girls is not a new phenomenon. The international community is still working to eradicate this harmful practice as it is considered a form of discrimination and gender based violence (GBV), and a violation of human rights. Recent decades have seen a steady global decline in child marriage, but this progress is fragile and can be reversed. For example child marriage increases during armed conflicts¹ and the COVID 19 pandemic is projected to result in ten million more child marriages.²

Climate change is now emerging as a new risk factor for child marriage by acting as a threat multiplier and amplifying existing drivers such as gender inequality and economic stress, which can push vulnerable families deeper into poverty and girls into early marriages.

As existing evidence linking climate change and child marriage was fragmented, Action on Child, Early and Forced Marriage, supported by the International Council of Women, convened a Virtual Multi-stakeholder Expert Group Meeting in March 2022, which established a clear link between these two issues, and has since been verified by others.

The outcomes from the Multi-stakeholder Expert Group Meeting³ on the Nexus Between Climate Change and Child Marriage were presented during an informal briefing on 5th February 2024 with the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) committee. CEDAW is the foremost UN instrument dedicated to fighting all forms of discrimination against women including gender inequality. Importantly, the CEDAW Committee has elaborated General Recommendation (GR) No. 37⁴ on gender-related dimensions of disaster risk management in the context of climate change, which is a powerful advocacy tool for civil society to draw on in addressing the increases in child marriage observed in the context of climate change.

This report consists of two sections; the recent CEDAW informal briefing held on 5th February 2024 at the UN in Geneva, and as a background supporting document, a policy brief of the Multi-stakeholder Expert Group Meeting held in March 2022.

1. OHCHR www.ohchr.org/en/women/child-and-forced-marriage-including-humanitarian-settings

2. UNICEF *10 million additional girls at risk of child marriage due to COVID-19* ([unicef.org](https://www.unicef.org))

3. *Expert-Group-Report-on-Climate-change-and-child-marriage-14.05_FINAL-2.pdf* (actiononchildearlyandforcedmarriage.org)

4. CEDAW General Recommendation No. 37

<https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n18/068/98/pdf/n1806898.pdf?token=TRmQkwQnE6Mvvxh8cp&fe=true>

CEDAW INFORMAL BRIEFING

PRESENTATION BY MOHINDER WATSON, UN GENEVA

Global statistics show a steady decline in child marriage but the practice can increase in vulnerable groups in times of heightened food and economic insecurity and instability such as during conflicts or as was seen during the COVID 19 pandemic. Climate change has now emerged as an additional risk factor for child marriage through amplifying pre-existing drivers such as economic and food insecurity.

A short video was shown at the start courtesy of the Brides of the Sun Project team - Foreign Correspondent and Photojournalist Gethin Chamberlain, Writer Maria Udrescu and Video Journalist Miriam Beller, who had spent five months in Malawi and Mozambique documenting the stories of climate brides.⁵

Summary of the main points raised at the CEDAW informal briefing

1. Child marriage an on-going global challenge

Child marriage remains a significant global challenge. Target 5.3 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) refers specifically to eradicating the practice. Numerous other UN human rights instruments and resolutions also call for eradicating child marriage including the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, CEDAW, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Human Rights Council resolutions on child, early and forced marriage, as well as others, highlighting its long-standing and ongoing global importance.

2. Gender perspective is missing from the climate change agenda

Climate change is one of the biggest global threats facing humanity which is predicted to become worse over time. People globally will be affected by climate change but precisely how this will impact individual lives will differ depending on their level of vulnerability and their ability to adapt and mitigate the risks they face.

Research shows women and girls⁶ are disproportionately affected by climate change as they face multiple forms of discriminations including lower levels of education, less access to resources, and more barriers to land ownership and use.⁷

Despite this, insufficient attention is currently paid to the socio-economic impacts of climate change, especially on women and girls. The gender dimensions of climate change do not as yet feature prominently on the climate change agenda as climate change is still largely framed in technological and scientific terms.

5. Brides of the Sun Project <https://bridesofthesun.com> and video <https://bridesofthesun.com/video>

6. Note: It was acknowledged that women and girls are not homogeneous groups – and in this report refer to women and girls in all their diversity. The importance of intersectionality was recognised and that gender is not binary.

7. CEDAW GR No 37. <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n18/068/98/pdf/n1806898.pdf?token=YvVaitErZKm8VGbdlb&fe=true>

3. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC) sets out the legal framework and provides a platform for multilateral cooperation and action to combat climate change.⁸ Members of the UNFCCC are provided scientific evidence for climate change, its impacts and options for adaptation and mitigation by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).⁹ Members of the UNFCCC meet annually at the Conference of Parties (COP), the supreme decision-making body of the Convention to take stock of, and advance progress.¹⁰

Growing calls have been made for the gender dimensions of climate change to be integrated in the FCCC which have been heeded, and gender integration is now being monitored annually. However, FCCC Secretariat reports suggest that progress on gender integration is slow. This is a concern as the long timeframe required for gender responsive adaptation and mitigation policies to translate into direct action in local communities and individual households will come too late for girls around the world already at risk of child marriage.

However, of note is that the FCCC 2022 report Dimensions and examples of the gender-differentiated impacts of climate change, the role of women as agents of change and opportunities for women,¹¹ under paragraph 26, refers specifically to child marriage being observed as a coping strategy in response to disasters:

..."Notably, child marriage, which is considered an act of gender-based violence, has been observed in various communities in different countries and regions as a means of coping in the event of disaster, for example in Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Kenya as a means to secure funds or assets."

4. How does the climate change-child marriage nexus relate to CEDAW?

CEDAW is the foremost UN instrument fighting all forms of discrimination against women and girls and promoting their equal rights. Importantly, CEDAW's General Recommendation (GR) No. 37 on gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change¹² has already recognised and addressed the unequal impacts of climate change such as its disproportionate impact on women and girls, including child marriage.

5. GR No. 37 – References to child marriage in the context of climate change

CEDAW's GR No. 37 is a powerful advocacy tool for civil society and others in addressing issues of child marriage in the context of climate change. The text emphasises the necessity for States to address both existing and new risk factors for GBV against women and girls, which includes child marriage. It also stipulates a minimum legal age for marriage as 18 years, for both women and men, and sets out States' obligations to establish mechanisms to prevent, monitor and address child, early and forced marriages within local and regional disaster management plans. It also asks States to address the root causes of GBV against women impacted by disasters and recognises the importance of making interlinkages between climate change and gender inequality stating:

..."Consideration of the interlinkages between climate change and gender inequality is increasingly recognized as fundamental for effective adaptation".

As gender inequality is a root cause of child marriage, it is essential that climate change adaptation strategies include social protection, building climate resilient livelihoods and communities and other measures including financing to protect vulnerable families prone to climate change so that family survival does not come at the expense of girl child marriage.

8. UNFCCC eHandbook - <https://unfccc.int/resource/bigpicture>

9. IPCC Fact Sheet - https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2021/07/AR6_FS_What_is_IPCC.pdf

10. FCCC Conference of the Parties (COP) - <https://unfccc.int/process/bodies/supreme-bodies/conference-of-the-parties-cop>

11. Dimensions and examples of the gender-differentiated impacts of climate change, the role of women as agents of change and opportunities for women 2022 - https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/sbi2022_07.pdf

12. CEDAW GR No. 37 (2018).

<https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n18/068/98/pdf/n1806898.pdf?token=YvVaitErZKm8VGbdlb&fe=true>

6. Need for a multi-stakeholder meeting

Existing literature on the inter-linkages between climate change and child marriage is fragmented and produced by different stakeholders across the world for different purposes. To take stock of the existing data and to better understand these inter-linkages from different perspectives a Virtual Multi-stakeholder Expert Group Meeting was held involving academics, UN Agencies, humanitarian aid agencies, journalists, faith-based organisations, child rights organisations, human rights organisations, climate change activists and NGOs.

7. Pathways identifying how climate change can increase child marriage

Through the multi-stakeholder gathering in March 2022, the following pathways were identified to explain the observed increases seen in climate-related child marriage:

- Existing economic stress can be amplified due to climate change, for example crop failure can push already vulnerable families deeper into poverty, some of whom may resort to child marriage as a short-term coping strategy to enable family survival.
- During the displacement of people due to climate change, security concerns may increase, such as fear of sexual violence or exploitation including trafficking. This, in combination with other risk factors can drive parents to use child marriage as a way to mitigate these risks and protect family honour.
- Where families are at risk of becoming homeless e.g. in coastal flood plains, parents may arrange marriages early to secure a better future for their daughters in other areas less prone to such climate change risks.
- The disruption to girls' education from school closures due to the damage or destruction of infrastructure can increase child marriage. In the absence of schooling, child marriage is often seen as the only alternative for girls. Less well educated girls are generally more likely to be married underage.
- With increased poverty, gender discrimination can become intensified with boys' education being prioritized, and girls being taken out of school and married early.
- Bride price income and dowry price considerations can become powerful incentives for early marriage. The bride price wealth can generate a much needed income for girls' families as a means of survival. Dowry payments made to the groom's family can also drive child marriage eg. if the groom's family agree to accept a lower dowry payment in exchange for marriage to a younger girl, parents may feel compelled to accept the marriage proposal.

8. Recommendations from the 2022 Multi-stakeholder meeting

- Enact and implement laws/policies to prevent child marriage, stipulate 18 as minimum age of marriage.
- Build climate resilient education systems: prioritize girls' access to education even during crises.
- Promote gender-responsive climate adaptation and mitigation strategies which address the needs and perspectives of women and girls such as the protection of girls from child marriage, and other forms of GBV eg. trafficking and also the necessary resources.
- Invest in building climate resilient communities: eg. climate-resilient infrastructure, agriculture and water resources to limit impacts of climate change on livelihoods, crop diversification and alternative income earning capacities.
- Address social norms by challenging harmful gender norms around child marriage in the context of climate change including engaging men, boys and religious leaders.
- Adopt a child rights and human rights based approach: support and empower girls and women to assume leadership roles and protect the rights of disproportionately affected groups including women and girls.
- Increase research funding on the intersection between climate change and gender, such as on harmful gender norms and GBV against women and girls including child marriage.

9. Growing evidence of the climate change - child marriage nexus

Recently published reports by various stakeholders are further strengthening the body of knowledge on the links between climate change and child marriage. Based on the collective findings from the 2022 Multi-stakeholder Expert Group Meeting on the Nexus Between Climate Change and Child Marriage,¹³ a 2023 scoping review commissioned by UNFPA,¹⁴ a 2023 systematic review by Docherty et al.,¹⁵ on evidence of the link between climate change and child marriage and the 2023 Girl Childhood report by Save the Children,¹⁶ countries where the links between climate change and child marriage have been observed, studied or reviewed include Bangladesh, Malawi, Mozambique, Ethiopia, India, Mali, Vietnam, Nepal, Kenya, Somalia, Central African Republic, Tanzania, Chad, Zimbabwe, Burkina Faso, Niger, Guinea, South Sudan, Pakistan and other Sub-Saharan African countries in aggregated data.

10. The cost of inaction is high

Climate change-related child marriages are already happening. As the effects of climate change are predicted to become worse over time, it is likely that more child marriages will occur as vulnerable families will face abject poverty, may become internally displaced or face migration and vulnerable women and girls will face increased risks of GBV.

Both society and individuals are harmed by underage marriages. Child marriage is a barrier to achieving gender equality and affects fertility rates, population growth and child and maternal health. On an individual level, child marriage for girls not only can mean a lifetime of disadvantage including the loss of their childhood and their right to an education, but also an increased risk of domestic violence with little or no support or access to justice.

Thus, the cost of procrastination is high. If urgent action is not taken, there will be a generation of climate change-related child brides which could have been avoided.

There is a clear need for long-term evidence-based solutions to address the gender dimensions of climate change internationally through the FCCC. However, given the complexity and enormity of this task, it will require many years for the 198 countries which are parties to the agreement to reach consensus. Time will also be required for national adaptation plans to be agreed, financed and implemented before such policies will impact local communities and individual households to prevent child marriage in the context of climate change.

Thus time is a critical factor for the many girls currently at risk of child marriage due to climate change. As the capacity of vulnerable families to adapt and mitigate the risks of climate change risks becomes exhausted, these families may see no alternative to securing the family's survival except through the early marriage of daughters.

Evidence for the link between climate change and child marriage is steadily accumulating and has already advanced since the Multi-stakeholder Expert Group Meeting held in March 2022. While the work of the FCCC in integrating gender dimensions in its policies is to be commended, civil society and others are encouraged to make use of CEDAW GR No. 37 on Gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change in conjunction with other relevant CEDAW General Recommendations. These include Joint GR No. 31 on Harmful Practices, GR No. 35 on Gender Based Violence against women and GR No. 38 on Trafficking in women and girls in the context of migration. These are powerful advocacy tools which can already help to protect girls from child marriage and other forms of GBV in the context of climate change.

13. [Expert-Group-Report-on-Climate-change-and-child-marriage-14.05_FINAL-2.pdf](#) (actiononchildearlyandforcedmarriage.org)

14. Pope et al., 2023. What is the current evidence for the relationship between the climate and environmental crises and child marriage? A scoping review. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/17441692.2022.2095655?needAccess=true>

15. Doherty et al., 2023 Association between child, early, and forced marriage and extreme weather events: A mixed-methods systematic review. *International Social Work*, 2023; DOI: [10.1177/00208728231186006](https://doi.org/10.1177/00208728231186006)

16. [Global Girlhood Report 2023: Girls at the Centre of the Storm – Her planet, her future, her solutions](#) | Save the Children's Resource Centre

11. Key messages from CEDAW Informal Briefing

- Policy makers including in the UNFCCC must acknowledge and address the inter-linkages between climate change and its gender dimensions including child marriage, GBV against women and girls and all other forms of discrimination in a timely manner.
- The CEDAW committee is requested to be vigilant and keep track of increases in child marriage in the context of climate change as climate change has now emerged as a new risk factor for child marriage alongside conflicts and the COVID 19 pandemic.
- Civil society is encouraged to draw on CEDAW GR No. 37 as well as other relevant General Recommendations and other UN instruments which can be powerful advocacy tools to help prevent climate-related child marriages in local communities.
- Funders must support research to build a robust evidence base for the link between climate change and child marriage to strengthen advocacy for urgent action.
- Civil society and others should support initiatives for free, compulsory secondary education for all children as this can keep girls in school and out of child marriages.

Evidence is steadily growing for climate change acting as a new risk factor contributing to increases in child marriages observed across several countries. The cost of inaction is high as it could result in a generation of climate change child brides which could have been avoided.

12. Next steps – Follow up CEDAW Informal Briefing in October 2024

Following encouragement from the CEDAW Committee to continue this research and the invitation for a second CEDAW informal briefing in October 2024, work with the Multi-stakeholder Expert Group established in 2022 will continue. In addition further stakeholders will be consulted for information in preparation for the October CEDAW informal briefing.

Acknowledgements.

Mohinder Watson is grateful to the UN CEDAW Committee and Secretariat for the opportunity to share findings from the March 2022 Virtual Multi-stakeholder Expert Group Meeting on the Nexus Between Climate Change and Child Marriage convened by Action on Child, Early and Forced Marriage with the support of the International Council of Women. CEDAW committee members are thanked for their insightful questions and comments, encouragement and invitation to present further information at a second CEDAW informal briefing during the October 2024 session of CEDAW at the UN in Geneva.

Based on the evidence presented above, the policy brief which follows on the findings of the Virtual Multi-stakeholder Expert Group Meeting on the Nexus Between Climate Change and Child Marriage held in March 2022, sheds some more light on the topic.

POLICY BRIEF ON THE NEXUS BETWEEN CLIMATE CHANGE AND CHILD MARRIAGE

1. Aims of this policy brief

This policy brief aims to raise awareness of the increasing risk of child marriage in the context of climate change through sharing emerging evidence from academics, investigative journalists, programmatic leaders from humanitarian organisations and others covering areas in Bangladesh, Mozambique, Indonesia, India, Kenya, Ethiopia, Tanzania and Malawi. It is also an urgent call to action to all stakeholders to address this emerging global issue.

2. Executive summary

Since 2015, States have committed to meet the targets of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) including SDG 13 on climate change and its impacts, SDG 5 on gender equality, which includes ending child marriage by 2030, and target 16.2 to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children.

Climate change is having a devastating impact on the environment and people's lives, assets and livelihoods, but its impacts are not gender neutral, with vulnerable groups such as women and girls disproportionately affected. Adverse climatic events contribute to poverty, food insecurity, displacement, disrupted education, gender discrimination and safety concerns regarding the sexual abuse and exploitation of girls which would harm girls and threaten family honour. The scientific and technological framing of climate change discourse has largely ignored its negative gendered dimensions including an increase in child marriage which has cascading detrimental outcomes for the health and well-being of girls. Emerging evidence suggests that the indirect effects of climate change are increasing child marriage among vulnerable communities in complex ways by exacerbating pre-existing drivers.

The lives of climate change-related child brides have already been documented in Malawi and Mozambique where girls have been married off for a bride price of as little as \$35 as a coping strategy in response to the dire economic circumstances of families. This trend is predicted to increase as already vulnerable families are pushed deeper into poverty due to the loss of agriculture-reliant livelihoods and displacement. Any increases in child marriage undermine the United Nations' efforts to eradicate the practice which is considered a violation of human rights and a barrier to achieving gender equality.

Urgent action is needed from all stakeholders - Member States, UN entities, civil society, parliamentarians, health workers, local communities, educators and faith-based leaders and communities to address this issue. Based on a Virtual Multi-Stakeholder International Group Meeting which convened world experts, the following actionable policy recommendations emerged: uphold and promote a child rights and human rights centred approach in all policies, implement and enforce legal reforms which consider girls' climate-related vulnerabilities, develop climate resilient communities by investing in climate-resilient livelihoods, social protection and early warning systems, prioritize girls' access to education even during crises, mainstream gender in all policies, integrate child marriage and child protection measures into climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies, address social norms through awareness raising and community empowerment to challenge harmful customs around child marriage and invest in research to better understand and address the nexus between climate change and gender including child marriage.

3. Introduction

Child marriage – a barrier to achieving gender equality

Child marriage refers to a marriage in which at least one of the spouses is aged under 18. Target 5.3 of Goal 5 on Gender Equality in the UN SDGs aims to eliminate child marriage, seen as a violation of human rights and a barrier to achieving gender equality. Despite global efforts to eliminate the practice, 12 million girls a year still enter child marriage.¹⁷

Although the practice also affects boys, girls are disproportionately affected as they are less valued than boys in some societies. Child marriage is already known to increase in times of economic hardship and in response to threats of gender-based violence against women such as seen during conflict, disasters and the COVID 19 pandemic. Now climate change is emerging as a risk factor contributing to increases in child marriage. In families with limited resources, boys' education is often prioritised whereas girls are usually the first to be taken out of school and married early.

This denies girls their childhood and an opportunity for educational attainment. Education becomes replaced by adult responsibilities including domestic chores, child bearing and caring for family members. Early pregnancies can result in birth complications, affecting child and maternal health and the power imbalance due to the age difference between the spouses can increase girls' risk of domestic violence. These and other negative effects drive the global need to end child marriage.

The climate change context

Climate change is one of the biggest global threats facing humanity. Its adverse effects on weather patterns is already negatively impacting agricultural practices for millions, resulting in food insecurity, loss of livelihoods and assets and increased poverty and displacement.

While climate change affects both men and women, it disproportionately affects marginalized communities and amplifies the existing vulnerabilities of, and discrimination against women and girls. Faced with existential threats from climate change, some families feel they have no choice but to resort to child marriage as a short-term coping strategy for family survival.

Understanding the nexus between climate change and child marriage

Evidence of the link between climate change and child marriage is slowly emerging, although this connection may not seem immediately obvious since child marriage is an indirect consequence of climate change, rather than a direct one. However, this nexus is complex, under-researched and to date few policy makers have joined the dots to make this important link.

Moreover, countries most affected by climate change are unlikely to be monitoring and reporting this issue. Nonetheless, sufficient evidence already exists of climate change related child brides living in Malawi, Mozambique and other countries which warrants taking this issue seriously. Girls are being married in exchange for a bride price as little as \$35 indicating the dire levels of poverty families are experiencing. Thus, although an increase in child marriage due to climate change is still framed as a future possibility, in reality, it is already happening in many countries.

Relationship between climate change vulnerability and child marriage

Data compiled from the Climate Change Risk Index and UNICEF country reports by Action on Child, Early and Forced Marriage in January 2022 showed that eight of the top ten countries most vulnerable to climate change also had high rates of child marriage from 20% in Bolivia to 76% in Niger.

17. UNICEF 2023 [Is an End to Child Marriage within Reach? - UNICEF DATA](#)

Table 1: Countries' ranking to climate change risk¹⁸ and their respective rates of child marriage.¹⁹

Ranking in Climate Risk Index (based on actual events in 2019)	Countries ranked most at risk of climate change	Percentage girls married in union before age 18 (UNICEF country reports)
1	Mozambique	53%
2	Zimbabwe	34%
3	Bahamas	-
4	Japan	-
5	Malawi	42%
6	Islamic Republic of Afghanistan	28%
7	India	27%
8	South Sudan	52%
9	Niger	76%
10	Bolivia	20%

To better understand the link between climate change and child marriage Action on Child Early and Forced Marriage with the support of the International Council of Women convened a Virtual Multi-Stakeholder International Expert Group Meeting. This aimed to bring together experts to share and consolidate the existing body of evidence from different disciplines, sources and countries including Bangladesh, Mozambique, Indonesia, India, Kenya, Ethiopia, Tanzania and Malawi.

4. Drivers and consequences of child marriage in climate-affected contexts

Child marriage is common in some parts of the world, most often driven by poverty, gender inequality, low levels of education and cultural norms. However, these baseline rates of child marriage can increase when families are exposed to additional economic shocks or instability, such as during conflict, natural disasters and the COVID 19 pandemic.

Climate change has now also been shown to be a risk factor for increased child marriage. Pathways through which climate change can increase child marriage include:

- **Amplifying existing economic stress** due to crop failure, loss of livelihoods, and resource scarcity, pushing vulnerable families deeper into poverty, most without savings and social protection who may resort to child marriage as a coping strategy which can also help to reduce the size of the family.
- **Heightening security concerns** including the fear of sexual violence or exploitation of girls during displacement when families may be on the move or living in temporary shelters where protection for women and children may be minimal. Child marriage is seen to mitigate this risk, keep girls marriageable and also avoids any negative perceptions of family honour.
- **Increasing risk of homelessness** in areas prone to climate change such as coastal flood plains and river banks may prompt parents to arrange marriages early to secure a better future for the daughters' away from such environmental stressors.
- **Disrupting girls' education** due to school closures where infrastructure is damaged or destroyed. In the absence of schooling, girl child marriage is the default life course as no other alternative is seen for them. Girls with lower levels of education are generally at a higher risk of child marriage.
- **Intensifying gender discrimination** whereby boys' education is prioritized, and girls are often the first to be taken out of school and married early.
- **Increasing child marriage due to bride price and dowry considerations.** The marriage of a girl in some sub-Saharan African countries will generate a bride price income for the bride's family. In other coun-

18. Global Climate Risk Index 2021. <https://www.preventionweb.net/publication/global-climate-risk-index-2021>

19. UNICEF child marriage country profiles. <https://data.unicef.org/resources/child-marriage-country-profiles/>

tries such as India, girls' families may be persuaded to marry girls early in return for a reduced dowry payment to the groom's family. Regardless of the direction of the financial flow involved, ultimately, the outcome for young girls is the same – early marriage in response to economic stress where it is used as a (mal) adaptive coping strategy.

Thus, the indirect impacts of climate change can interweave in complex ways to increase girls' risk of child marriage with long-term negative consequences for their education, well-being and life prospects and long-term consequences for society.

5. Insights from case studies shared during the International Expert Group Meeting

The full report²⁰ of the Virtual Multi-Stakeholder International Expert Group Meeting on the nexus between climate change and child marriage showcases emerging evidence including case studies, a few of which are highlighted here.

In Indonesia researchers showed how economic hardship from loss and damage attributed to climate change is linked to child marriage. Each \$75 worth of loss and damage incurred by a family increased the likelihood of child marriage by 4%. Also, the larger the family, the greater the risk of girl child marriage. Early warning systems were found to not only reduce loss and damage, but they could also act as a protective factor against child marriage.

In disaster prone areas of Bangladesh, researchers found climate-induced economic hardship and risk of displacement could influence a family's decision to marry daughters at an early age to keep them safe and to secure their future away from disaster prone areas. The fear of sexual violence and trafficking of girls could also drive child marriage. During climate crises parents may become separated from their children, or families may be living in temporary shelters where security and protection from traffickers may be minimal.

Journalists from the Brides of the Sun project documented stories of families forced to marry their daughters just to survive in Mozambique and Malawi. These marriages were driven by the bride price paid to the girl's family, often as little as \$35 showing the desperate economic situation of families. World Vision International's evaluation of their programs in 24 countries showed a clear link between climate change and child marriage and led to the development of the concept of 'intentionality' to bring together their climate change and child protection policies.

6. Conclusions

Evidence linking climate change and child marriage is steadily increasing as more policy makers and academics recognize this important connection. The lives of climate change brides have already been documented in Malawi, Mozambique, Bangladesh and other locations. World Vision International's evaluations of their environmental and child protection programs in 24 countries also support evidence for the link between climate change and child marriage. Recent reports by others are now further strengthening the findings of the Multi-stakeholder Expert Group Meeting held in March 2022.

Policies and programs addressing the causes of child marriage must recognize these additional climate change-related risks in locations prone to extreme weather events. Investments in vulnerable locations together with social protection can help build climate resilient livelihoods and communities, allowing families to overcome short-term economic shocks to avoid resorting to early marriage as a coping strategy. As we look towards the Summit of the Future, the 30th Anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Plat-

20. Full Report [Expert-Group-Report-on-Climate-change-and-child-marriage-14.05_FINAL-2.pdf](#)
(actiononchildearlyandforcedmarriage.org)

form for Action and COP 29 later in 2024, a paradigm shift in thinking is needed to address the gendered impacts of climate change and to ensure that gender-responsive strategies are integrated into climate change and mitigation policies to protect women and girls and other vulnerable groups in a timely manner.

7. Key policy recommendations

- **Legal Reforms:** Enact, strengthen and enforce laws and policies that prohibit child marriage, consider girls' climate-related vulnerabilities and protect the rights of girls.
- **Climate resilient education systems:** Develop climate-resilient educational infrastructure and systems that prioritize girls' access to education even during climate crises, conflict, disasters and pandemics.
- **Integrate gender-responsive climate policies:** Promote and integrate gender-responsive climate adaptation and mitigation strategies in climate action that address the unique needs and perspectives of girls and women, including child marriage vulnerabilities, trafficking and risk of gender based violence.
- **Invest in climate resilient communities:** Support climate-affected communities by investing in climate-resilient infrastructure, agriculture, and water resources to limit impacts of climate change on livelihoods. Value and promote women's leadership.
- **Address social norms through changing mindsets:** Raise awareness and empower communities to challenge harmful gender norms around child marriage including in the context of climate change. Engage men and boys as key allies in changing attitudes and behaviours around child marriage.
- **Adopt a child rights and human rights approach:** Promote and protect the rights of disproportionately affected communities including women and girls.
- **Increase research and funding:** Allocate resources for research on the intersection between climate change and gender, including harmful gender norms, gender based violence and child marriage.

Thank you to all contributors

Mohinder Watson is grateful to all the contributors to the Multi-Stakeholder International Expert Group Meeting for their ongoing collaboration which has enabled the nexus of climate change and child marriage to be raised at the highest levels at the United Nations.

All references can be found in the full report of the Multi-stakeholder Expert Group Meeting and the Draft Concept Note for the meeting

Full report:

[Expert-Group-Report-on-Climate-change-and-child-marriage-14.05_FINAL-2.pdf](#)
([actiononchildearlyandforcedmarriage.org](#))

Concept Note for Multi-stakeholder Meeting:

[Concept-Note_Impact-of-Climate-Change-on-Child-Marriage_MW_11.3.2022.pdf](#)
([actiononchildearlyandforcedmarriage.org](#))

Contributors to the March 2022 Virtual Multi-stakeholder Expert Group Meeting:

Dr. Mohinder Watson, Meeting Convenor, Founder, Action on Child, Early and Forced Marriage and United Nations Geneva Representative, International Council of Women

Ms. Mikiko Otani, Former Chair and current member of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

Dr. Margaret Alston, Professor of Social Work, Newcastle University and Emeritus Professor, Monash University, Australia

Dr. Roberto Pastén, Associate Professor and Director of the Economics Institute of the Austral University of Chile

Dr. Teguh Dartanto, Dean, Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Indonesia

Ms. Heather Barr, Associate Director of the Women's Rights Division, Human Rights Watch

Dr. Lucia Corno, Associate Professor, Department of Economics and Finance, Cattolica University, Italy

Dr. Alessandra Voena, Professor of Economics, Department of Economics, Stanford University, USA

Dr. Nahid Rezwana, Associate Professor, Department of Geography and Environment, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh

Ms. Nankali Maksud, Senior Advisor, UNICEF Headquarters, Programme Division, USA

Dr. Mary Nyasimi, Executive Director, Inclusive Climate Change Adaptation for a Sustainable Africa, Kenya

Mr. Saul Butters, Assistant Country Director – Programmes, CARE Mozambique

Ms. Martina Hibell, Secretary General for Barnfonden (ChildFund Sweden)

Ms. Caroline Ouaffo Wafang, Advisor on Gender and Women's Rights, OHCHR, Switzerland

Ms. Laila Khondkar, Independent Expert on Child Protection, Bangladesh

Ms. Tamara Tutnjevic, Senior Policy Adviser for Ending Violence against Children, World Vision International.

"Brides of the Sun" Project Team, Foreign Correspondent and Photojournalist Mr. Gethin Chamberlain, Writer Ms. Maria Udrescu and Video Journalist Ms. Miriam Beller.

Acknowledgements: Dr. Latika Bhangiri, Dr. Andrew Medlicott and Ms. Walaa Allahham, consultant with Action on Child, Early and Forced Marriage are thanked for their valuable assistance in editing and presenting this work. Ms. Linda Liu, Board Member, International Council of Women is thanked for her support and that of the board with the Multi-stakeholder Meeting in 2022 and this report.

Disclaimer: the views expressed in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the contributors to the multi-stakeholder expert group meeting.

Link to full report: [Expert-Group-Report-on-Climate-change-and-child-marriage-14.05_FINAL-2.pdf](#) (actiononchildearlyandforcedmarriage.org)

Copyright: Action on Child, Early and Forced Marriage.

Email contact: actiononchildmarriage@gmail.com

Publication date: February 2024, Geneva, Switzerland.

Layout: Griff Design, Valais.