

Concept Note for a Virtual International Expert Group Meeting

Convened by Dr Mohinder Watson, Founder Action on Child, Early and Forced Marriage and Main UN Representative, International Council of Women

“Exploring the nexus between climate change and child marriage: what does the emerging evidence tell us?”

Virtual Event March 10th, 2022. 12.00 – 4.30 pm CET

Background

Climate change is one of the biggest global threats facing humanity. A warming planet is already adversely affecting human beings and the environment and resulting in the loss of lives, livelihoods, ecosystems, and biodiversity.

The 2021 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report¹ states that human-induced climate change is already affecting many weather patterns and climate extremes in all parts of the world. These include increases in the frequency and intensity of hot and cold extremes, marine heatwaves, heavy precipitation, droughts, changes in rainfall patterns, tropical cyclones and reductions in Arctic Sea ice, snow cover, and permafrost.

The UN acknowledges that climate change has been driven largely by industrialized countries, yet some of the countries most adversely affected are those that have contributed the least to it.² This is supported by the Global Climate Risk Index 2021³ which ranks the extent to which countries have been affected by climate-related extreme weather events. It shows that eight out of the ten countries most severely affected by extreme weather events were low or lower-middle income countries.

Although climate change impacts everyone, men and women are affected differently.⁴ Women, men, girls, and boys have different experiences of climate change due to the inequalities associated with socially constructed gender roles. These existing inequalities are further deepened by climate change. In developing countries, women and girls are more dependent on natural resources as they are usually responsible for crop production and for providing food and water for the household.⁵ In Sub-Saharan Africa, women account for 48.7 percent of agricultural labour but only 15 percent of agricultural land holders.⁶

When already struggling families face additional climate-related economic shocks, this affects family dynamics and especially harms adolescent girls. While child marriage is the result of a combination of many interconnected factors, additional financial hardship can compound

¹ IPCC report 2021. https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGI_SPM_final.pdf

² Secretary General’s Report 2022. Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes. <https://undocs.org/E/CN.6/2022/3>

³ Global Climate Risk Index 2021. <https://www.preventionweb.net/publication/global-climate-risk-index-2021>

⁴ UNFCCC 2019. Differentiated impacts of climate change on women and men; the integration of gender considerations in climate policies, plans and actions; and progress in enhancing gender balance in national climate delegations https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/sbi2019_inf8.pdf

⁵ Roots for the future: The landscape and way forward on gender and climate change. Washington, DC: IUCN & GGCA. <https://portals.iucn.org/union/sites/union/files/doc/roots-for-the-future-en.pdf>

⁶ Landlinks 2016: Land Tenure and Women’s Empowerment. <https://www.land-links.org/issue-brief/fact-sheet-land-tenure-womens-empowerment/>

existing vulnerabilities to drive child marriage as a coping strategy in efforts to smooth household income.⁷ Flash floods and cyclones in Bangladesh have been linked to increases in gender-based violence, sexual violence, and early marriage.⁸

Of the countries ranked the top ten most at risk of climate change in the Climate Risk Index 2021, eight of them have high rates of child marriage, ranging from 20 percent to 76 percent.

Table 1: Countries’ ranking to climate change risk⁹ and their respective rates of child marriage¹⁰ compiled by Mohinder Watson, Action on Child, Early and Forced Marriage.

Ranking in Climate Risk Index 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%

Any increase in child marriage has important implications as child marriage is a violation of children’s human rights and a barrier to achieving gender equality. Target 5.3 of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality aims to “eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) by 2030.”

Every year, 12 million girls are married as children.¹¹ This figure is predicted to increase by 10 million over the next decade due to the COVID-19 pandemic.¹² Child marriage has many negative consequences for girls as they often drop out of secondary school, experience early pregnancy and child birth, have more birth complications and an increased risk of domestic violence.¹³

As the negative impact of climate change is expected to increase in the future, it is vital that adolescent girls are protected from the risk of child marriage. Girls must have access to quality education as this can enable them to gain paid work, support their own children’s education, build more resilient families, and reduce their vulnerability to climate-related economic shocks.

⁷ Alston *et al.* 2014. Are climate challenges reinforcing child and forced marriage and dowry as adaptation strategies in the context of Bangladesh? https://www.monash.edu/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/2482893/Are-climate-challenges-reinforcing-child-and-forced-marriage.pdf

⁸ Ahmed, Khandaker Jafor, Shah Md Atiqul Haq, and Françoise Bartiaux. "The nexus between extreme weather events, sexual violence, and early marriage: a study of vulnerable populations in Bangladesh." *Population and Environment* 40, no. 3 (2019): 303-324.

⁹ Global Climate Risk Index 2021. <https://www.preventionweb.net/publication/global-climate-risk-index-2021>

¹⁰ UNICEF child marriage country profiles. <https://data.unicef.org/resources/child-marriage-country-profiles/>

¹¹ OHCHR website <https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/women/wrgs/pages/childmarriage.aspx>

¹² UNFPA 2020. Adapting to COVID 19 https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/Responding_to_COVID-19_Pivoting_the_GPECM_to_the_pandemic.pdf

¹³ Kohno A, Techasrivichien T, Sugimoto SP, Dahlui M, Nik Farid ND, Nakayama T (2020). Investigation of the key factors that influence the girls to enter into child marriage: A meta-synthesis of qualitative evidence. *PLoS ONE* 15(7): e0235959. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0235959>

Currently, climate change adaptation policies and child marriage prevention policies are largely seen as two unrelated areas, yet there is a clear connection between them. This must be better understood to enable these policies to be integrated to prevent child marriage from being used as a coping strategy in response to climate change. As children have rights as well as needs, climate change adaptation policies offer policymakers the opportunity to protect adolescent girls' rights and lives and advance gender equality.

Objectives of the Virtual Expert Group Meeting:

This meeting will convene experts from academia, UN agencies, civil society, development agencies, and other key stakeholders to share emerging evidence from different countries and settings for the linkages between climate change and increased rates of child marriage.

The panellists will:

1. Provide an overview of the gendered impact of climate change including child marriage;
2. Discuss the emerging evidence supporting the links between climate change and child marriage based on quantitative and qualitative methods;
3. Share examples of best practices of climate change adaptation policies which can help improve livelihoods and avert the use of child marriage as a coping strategy;
4. Provide different perspectives on how policies to address climate change and child marriage prevention can be better integrated as part of larger efforts to mainstream gender in climate change policies and research;
5. Identify and discuss areas for further research and recommend future actions to advance the meeting's outcomes.

There will be two panels each with around 5-6 speakers; the first will focus on the evidence base for the links between climate change and child marriage and the second will focus on best practices in climate change adaptation strategies and consider how climate change and child marriage policies can be synchronised at the local, regional and national level. Panellists will have 10 minutes to make their presentations. After all speakers have given their presentations, the Moderator, will open a question-and-answer session based on questions received before and during the session.

Opening remarks - Mikiko Otani, Chair UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

Panel 1: Evidence for the connection between climate change shocks and child marriage

This panel will bring together speakers from the University of Newcastle, Australia, Austral University, Chile, University of Indonesia, Journalist in Pakistan, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Italy, Stanford University, USA, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh

Panel 2: Sharing best practices of climate change adaption policies and how to better integrate climate change adaptation policies and child marriage prevention policies

This panel will bring together speakers from UNICEF, Kenya, Mozambique, Sweden, OHCHR, Switzerland, Bangladesh, World Vision International.

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