

# End Child Marriage Now!



**It takes us all**

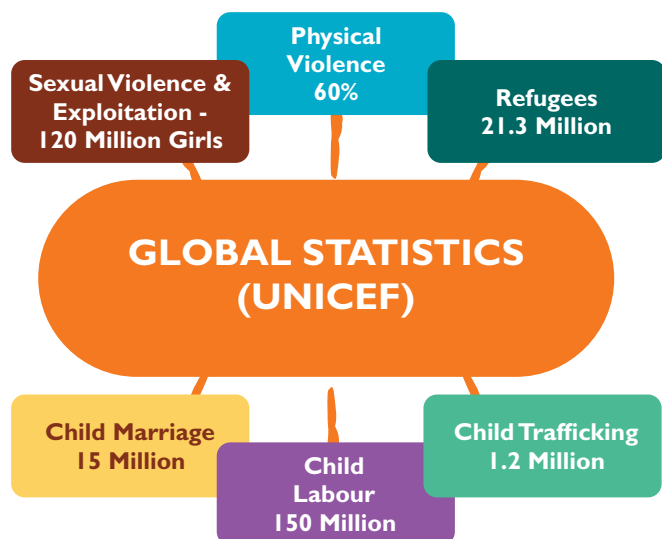
## **Introduction to World Vision International in Ghana:**

World Vision International in Ghana is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organization dedicated to the well-being of children. We work with communities to reach their full potential by tackling the root causes of poverty. World Vision started working in Ghana in 1979 and is currently working in all ten regions in Ghana. Our presence throughout Ghana is enabling us to contribute to the well-being of 4.5 million children and their families through the provision of access to quality education, access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene, improved livelihood, health and nutrition.

## **Global partnership campaign on End Violence against Children**

Every year, violence affects more than one billion children globally. It robs them of their dignity, their rights, their potential and their future. WVI's Global Partnership, is launching a five year (2017-2021) campaign dubbed **"It Takes a World to End Violence against Children"**. The campaign is "a bold expression of our intent to promote human transformation, seek justice, uphold the rights of children to be protected and bear witness to the Kingdom of God." Kevin Jenkins, WVI President & CEO.

World Vision International in Ghana's campaign theme is "End Child Marriage Now! It Takes Us All" with a goal to contribute to a 50% reduction of child marriage by 2021.



#### General Recommendations:

World Vision International in Ghana calls for the Government of Ghana, Faith Leaders, and Traditional leaders, Media, NGOs and other Key Stakeholders to:

1. Strengthen formal prevention and protection of children through the enforcement of laws and policies linked to child marriage;
2. Re-enforce informal prevention mechanisms by promoting awareness and changes in community attitudes and harmful practices and empower youth as issue ambassadors and child marriage preventers;
3. Intensify collaboration between the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection and Ministries of Health, Education and Social Welfare to address the root causes of child marriage

### What is the scale of the problem of Child Marriage in Ghana?

Child marriage is generally defined as a union that occurs when one or both spouses are below the age of 18. It includes any marriage which occurs without the full and free consent of one or both parties. Child marriage is a major threat to the survival, health and well-being of children and mothers. Child marriage denies victims their rights to health, protection and education and perpetuates

a vicious cycle of poverty. The practice places children, especially girls, at an increased risk of sexual, physical and psychological violence throughout their lives. In this country, according to Ghana Demographic Health (GDHS) 2014, one in four women (27%) are married before the age of 18 and 7% are married by age 15<sup>1</sup>. In the northern part of the country, the prevalence rate can be as high as 39%<sup>2</sup>.

MAP OF GHANA SHOWING PREVALENCE OF CHILD MARRIAGE (GDHS, 2014)



Child marriage rates are also higher in rural areas (36%) compared to urban areas (19%)<sup>3</sup>. Child marriage disproportionately affects girls over boys: among men aged 20-49 years, only 3% were married as boys before the age of 18, compared to 27% of girls<sup>4</sup>. Even though there has been a decrease in the rates of child marriage in Ghana from 31.5% in 2008 to 27.2% in 2014<sup>5</sup>, the current rates are still unacceptably high and need to be reduced immediately to give every girl the right to realise her full potential.

## Why Child Marriage?

In this country, child marriage is deeply rooted in **tradition** and **discriminatory gender norms**. Research by WILDAF Ghana found that parents' decision to marry off their daughter was often driven by their concern relating to female sexuality and family honour, in particular the fear that their daughter may become pregnant out of wedlock<sup>6</sup>. Child marriage may be seen by families as a way of protecting young girls from premarital sex, pregnancy outside of marriage, rape and even prostitution. By marrying a girl off early, the risk of uncertainty to her prospects or damage to a family's honour is significantly removed, although not the physical, psychological and other risks to the girl herself. This justification for child marriage only makes sense where women and girls have no greater value than as repositories for family honor or where girls' potential sexuality is seen as a risk that must be monitored and contained<sup>7</sup>.

**Poverty** plays a significant role in contributing to child marriage. In many parts of the world, parents marry off their daughters while they are still children, in the hope that the marriage will relieve their family's financial burden. For many poor families, child marriage can be a strategy for economic survival.

Among the poorest women in Ghana, 41.2% married before age 18 compared to 11.5% of rich women<sup>8</sup>.

**Lack of access to education** especially beyond primary level, further fuels the harmful practice of child marriage. Ghana has Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) but beyond that, children especially from poor homes are not able to continue due to lack of support and many are forced to marry to minimise the economic burden on family. Literature has shown that girls who stay longer in schools are less likely to be married early. In Ghana 41.6% of women with no education are married before age 18 as compared to 4.7% of women with secondary (+) level of education<sup>9</sup>.

**Teenage Pregnancy** is both a cause and consequence of child marriage. A research conducted by World Vision International, Ghana shows that teenage pregnancy is a common cause of child marriage<sup>10</sup>. According to the research most child brides admitted they had gotten married because they had settled with the father of the child as he has accepted responsibility while others

indicated their parents gave them an ultimatum to marry in order to protect the family honour.

**Lack of legal awareness and enforcement** promotes child marriage through ignorance of the illegality of child marriage or lack of fear of punishment even when laws are known.

## The consequences of Child Marriage

**Health:** Children, especially girls, are physically, emotionally and psychologically immature for marriage, pregnancy and parenthood. Child marriage compromises their development and often results in early pregnancy and social isolation, threatening the survival and health of both the young mother and her children. Early pregnancies increase the risk of death in childbirth, as well as pregnancy-related injuries such as obstetric fistula<sup>11</sup>. *Worldwide, 70,000 girls aged 15 to 19 die each year from complications related to early pregnancy and childbirth<sup>12</sup>. Girls who give birth before the age of 15 are five times more likely to die in childbirth than women in their 20s. Infants born to mothers younger than 18 years have a 60% higher risk of dying in the first year of life compared to those born to mothers older than 19 years.*

In Ghana, current child brides face these risks by having their first child on average at age 15.6 years<sup>13</sup>. Just a 10% reduction in child marriage globally could contribute to a 70% reduction in maternal mortality and a 3% reduction in infant mortality rates<sup>14</sup>. Child brides in Ghana also have more children than non-child brides (4 to 3)<sup>15</sup>.

**Education:** UNICEF studies consistently demonstrate that girls who marry early often abandon formal education and become pregnant. The demands of managing homes and raising children means they have little opportunity to pursue education and learn vocational skills. Every additional year of schooling that a girl receives can increase her earning potential by 10 to 20%<sup>16</sup>. Furthermore, the absence of formal education limits children's capacity to break the poverty cycle.

**Vulnerability to violence:** Child brides face an increased risk of violence, abuse and exploitation due to their lack of agency and the power imbalance within their new families. Recent global figures indicate that about one in three women (35%) worldwide has experienced physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime<sup>17</sup>. Girls who marry under 18 years of age, report experiencing physical violence twice as



Photo Credit: World Vision / Marian Roberts

often; girls marrying under 15 years report experiencing physical violence three times more often than those who married later<sup>18</sup>. Lower social and economic status leaves married girls with limited capacity to influence decisions about their own lives<sup>19</sup>. For instance, in Ghana only 7% of current child brides are using contraception compared to 25% of other married women<sup>20</sup>.

They also have less control over household purchases. Even the decision to visit relatives is restricted for Ghanaian child brides<sup>21</sup>. This often results in social isolation, which along with other factors can have major consequences for girls' mental, physical and emotional well-being.

**Economic & Social Development:** A country's economic growth is dependent on the productivity of an educated and skilled workforce and the development and well-being of its citizens depends on the government's ability to use national resources to benefit the population.

Child marriage impedes the productive capacity of future generations by impairing the ability of many girls to obtain sufficient education and participate in the formal workforce. Higher fertility rates among child brides force the government to provide services for a higher number of citizens. Health costs also increase due to the negative effects of adolescent pregnancies (maternal & child mortality, malnutrition, etc.) Preliminary research by International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW) and World Bank estimated that for Niger, child marriage will cost the government as much as \$25 billion between 2014 and 2030<sup>22</sup> if nothing is done to end it.

### Laws & Policies on Child Marriage

Ghana has made substantial international and national commitments to end child marriage, and has a comprehensive national policy framework in place. Although significant progress has been made, some important issues remain to be addressed.

Ghana was the first country to ratify the convention on the Rights of the Child which specifies 18 years as the legal age of marriage for girls and boys. Ghana has also ratified other human rights conventions and treaties such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The CEDAW states that, "the betrothal and the marriage of a child shall have no legal effect" and calls upon states to set legal minimum age for marriage of their young daughters and sons to offset strong social pressures at the community level. Ghana has also signed several African regional treaties to address child marriage including: The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child; The Protocol to the African Charter on Human Rights and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa; and The Commonwealth Kigali Declaration. Ghana recently adopted the Sustainable Development Goals which contain target 5.3 that specifically calls for the elimination of child, early and forced marriage by 2030.

Since independence, Ghana has developed laws and regulations that prohibit harmful practices including child marriage. The 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana and the Children's Act 1998 (Act 560) both define a child as

a person below the age of 18. The Children's Act further defines the minimum age of marriage in Ghana at 18 and prohibits children being withdrawn from school for marriage. Section 14 of the Act provides that a person shall not force a child to be betrothed, to be subject of a dowry transaction or to be married. Contravention of the law is to be punished by a fine of up to 5 million cedi or/and imprisonment for up to one (1) year.

The Criminal Code of 1960 (Act 29). Section 14 prohibits sex with anyone under the age of 16. In Section 109, the Code states, "Whoever by duress causes a person to marry against his or her will shall be guilty of a misdemeanor". However, the legal age limit for consensual sex in the Criminal Code is not aligned with the minimum age for marriage according to the Children's Act.

Ghana also has the Child and Family Welfare Policy, Justice for Children Policy, National Gender Policy, Adolescent Reproductive Health Policy, National Youth Policy, Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) policy and the school feeding programme all aimed at enhancing the protection and well-being of children in Ghana.



Photo Credit: World Vision / Joseline N. Annan

In 2014, the Government of Ghana created a Child Marriage Unit within the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection. A comprehensive policy framework has been developed and the Ministry has recently published a National Strategic Framework on Ending Child Marriage within Ghana<sup>23</sup>. The 10 year framework presents a multi-sectorial response to end child marriage, including: empowering children to prevent and respond to child marriage; positively influencing community beliefs and social norms; improving adolescent access to quality education, reproductive health services, vocational learning and justice and protective services; facilitating implementation and enforcement of existing policies and laws and increasing data and evidence to inform decision-making for continued action.

Despite existing laws and policies and the progress made to date, the government of Ghana and its partners need to take further action to accelerate the elimination of child marriage. Laws and policies are not yet fully funded, implemented and enforced, and there are still gaps in the formal and informal child protection system at all levels.

The INSPIRE framework, recently developed by WHO and UNICEF together with other partners, presents 7 evidence-based strategies to address violence against children, including child marriage. To eradicate child marriage and other forms of violence against children, a multi-stakeholder and multi-sectorial response is needed<sup>24</sup>.

Full implementation of the current National Strategic Framework by all partners could effectively eliminate child marriage in Ghana, improving child well-being and ensuring that girls can reach their full potential.

### Specific Recommendations:

WorldVision International in Ghana calls on the;

#### Government of Ghana to:

1. Strengthen formal prevention and protection of children through the enforcement of laws and policies linked to child marriage.

- a) Amend the Criminal Offences Act 1960 (Act 29 Section 14(a)) to increase the age of consensual sex of 16 to be consistent with the legal age of marriage of 18.
- b) Commit adequate financial resources to implement the National Strategic Framework to End Child Marriage in Ghana 2017 – 2026.
- c) Strengthen government child protection agencies to scale up services to prevent, protect and promote the rights of children.
- d) Work with stakeholders/partners to promote toll free call lines, referral as well as psychosocial services.
- e) Ensure an annual implementation review is established for the National Strategic Framework.

#### Faith Leaders, Traditional Leaders, CSOs, NGOs, Media and Children to:

2. Re-enforce informal prevention mechanisms by promoting awareness and changes in community attitudes and harmful practices and empower youth as issue ambassadors and child marriage preventers.

- a) Promote the resilience and voice of children through child empowerment and participation programmes.
- b) Strengthen national and regional houses of chiefs, traditional councils and religious leaders with adequate capacity to reform and abolish harmful traditional practices.
- c) Build community awareness of existing child marriage laws and formal prevention mechanisms and impact of child marriage.
- d) Promote community change conversations to raise awareness of harmful practices for community action and engagement with local government on child protection issues.
- e) Collaborate with the Ministry of Health: Reduce adolescent pregnancy through improved provision of adolescent sexual and reproductive health education and services.
- f) Collaborate with the Ministry of Education: Improve retention of girls in school through gender-friendly school environments and provision of scholarships for female students. Empower student committees to advocate for and take action to prevent child marriage.
- g) Collaborate with the Department of Social Welfare to increase opportunities for self-reliance of girls by improving their access to vocational and life skills training opportunities.

### ENDNOTES:

<sup>1</sup>UNICEF 2016 Child Marriage Database

<sup>2</sup>Ghana Demographic Health Survey (GDHS) 2014

<sup>3</sup>Ghana Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2011

<sup>4</sup>MICS 2011.

<sup>5</sup>GDHS 2014 and 2008

<sup>6</sup>Women in Law and Development in Africa (WiLDAF Ghana), March 2014. Scoping study for Parliamentary Advocacy Programme on Combating Early and Forced Marriage in Ghana,

<sup>7</sup>Equality Now, 2014. Protecting the Girl Child-Using the Law to End Child, Early and Forced Marriages and Related Human Rights Violations.

<sup>8</sup>MICS 2011.

<sup>9</sup>MICS 2011.

<sup>10</sup>Child Marriage report in Ghana, WorldVision

<sup>11</sup>Girls Not Brides. Fistula: A Silent Tragedy for Child Brides.

<sup>12</sup>UNICEF (2009) 'State of the World's Children

<sup>13</sup>University of Ghana-Centre for Social Policy Studies and World Vision Ghana, 2017. A Study on Child Marriage in Selected World Vision Operational Areas.

<sup>14</sup>Raj A, Boehmer U. (2013) Girl child marriage and its association with national rates of HIV, maternal health, and infant mortality across 97 countries. *Violence against Women*, 19:536-51.

<sup>15</sup>UG/WVG research report, 2017.

<sup>16</sup>Women Deliver. Deliver for Good.

<sup>17</sup>World Health Organization (2016) Violence against women: Intimate partner and sexual violence against women fact sheet

<sup>18</sup>International Centre for Research on Women (2007). New Insights on Preventing Child Marriage

<sup>19</sup>UNICEF (2005). Early marriage: A Harmful Traditional Practice: A Statistical Exploration

<sup>20</sup>UG/WVG research report, 2017.

<sup>21</sup>UG/WVG research report, 2017.

<sup>22</sup>International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW) & World Bank (2015): Economic Impacts of Child Marriage: Preliminary findings from analyses of existing data

<sup>23</sup>Ghana Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection and Unicef, 2017. National Strategic Framework for Ending Child Marriage In Ghana.

<sup>24</sup>World Health Organization 2016 INSPIRE: Seven strategies for Ending Violence Against Children

