



CITIZEN ACTION TO END CHILD, EARLY AND FORCED MARRIAGE

“A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND DIALOGUE PROJECT”

FACILITATOR’S GUIDE

Applying a community engagement and dialogue approach as a tool to prevent and respond to child, early and forced marriage in Port Loko district of Sierra Leone.

What do you know about Child, Early and Forced Marriage and Unions?

Child, early and forced marriage and unions (CEFMU) are human rights violation that rob girls of their childhood, education and limit their possibilities for growth and stability. CEFMU also results in increased risks of violence, abuse, rape, sexual assault, early pregnancy and maternal mortality and morbidity. Child marriage is a brutal curtailment of childhood and a violation of human rights. A harmful practice that disproportionately affects more girls than boys, it has a profound and life-changing impact on the lives of children, their families, and subsequent generations. It is estimated that each year, 15 million girls are married before the age of 18. Half of all girls living in the least developed countries are likely to marry before they reach adulthood, and girls who live in fragile contexts or countries facing humanitarian crises are among the most vulnerable. The impact of child marriage can be catastrophic, ranging from severe sexual and reproductive health complications and an increase in child mortality to domestic violence, social isolation, and extreme poverty. These impacts are further compounded in fragile contexts by the weakness of governments and/ or other support systems, which are unable to protect and fulfill civil rights.

What does the law provide for Child, Early and Forced Marriage in Sierra Leone?

Sierra Leone's major child marriage legislation is the 2007 Child Rights Act, which states that the minimum age of betrothal/marriage is eighteen years old. The act also commits the country to the elimination of the forced marriage of girls. It rejects the customary practices of betrothal and marriage for minors, and orders that such practices may not be forced upon minors. According to Sierra Leonean customary law, a marriage is not considered a valid customary marriage unless both parties are at least 18 years old, with the Customary Marriage and Divorce Act dictating this in 2007. However, in the case that a minor's parents are able to give consent to the union, a legal marriage is able to take place. If the consent of the parents is not able to be achieved, a Magistrate or Local Government Chief Administrator of the locality in which the marriage is to take place is able to provide their consent to verify the marriage. In accordance with customary tradition, child marriages are often the result of unions arranged by the parents of the young bride. As stated by UNICEF's The State of the World's Children 2013 report, 18% of Sierra Leonean women are married by the age of 15, while 44% of them are married by the age of 18. As of 2017, Sierra Leone was ranked by UNICEF as the 19th nation for the highest rates of child marriage.

Five very important things to know about Child, Early and Forced Marriage

- a. Child marriage is declining globally, but progress has been uneven between and within countries. The global burden of child marriage is shifting from South Asia to sub-Saharan Africa, where there is only a modest rate of decline. Latin America and the Caribbean is the only region of the world where there is no evidence of progress, with levels of child marriage as high as they were 25 years ago.

- b. Poverty is one of the most significant drivers of Child, early and forced marriage and unions (CEFMU), particularly for uneducated girls in rural communities. Some families may view early marriage as a means of securing their daughters' futures, while others may view her as an economic burden or a commodity, or even a means for settling familial debts or disputes.
- c. A significant number of states still impose laws and policies that directly discriminate against pregnant girls and adolescent mothers by not allowing them to attend school. Girls and young women who are married or become pregnant are also often forced to forgo education, even if they are not legally prohibited from going to school.
- d. The root causes of CEFMU are deeply embedded gender inequalities and harmful gender norms that devalue and restrict women and girls. They also normalize and provide impunity for wider gender-based violence and discrimination. If efforts are not accelerated, more than 150 million girls will have married before their eighteenth birthday by 2030.
- e. Child marriage rates increase significantly during conflict and in humanitarian settings when the factors that drive CEFMU are exacerbated. Families who have lost their livelihoods might marry off their daughters to ease the financial burden, or they may see marriage as a way to protect girls from the heightened threat of sexual and physical violence.

What can we do to End Child, Early and Forced Marriage?

- Individuals, civil society, lawmakers, and decision-makers in all sectors must challenge the harmful social and cultural norms that are among the primary causes of child marriage.
- Ending child marriage requires cross-sectoral approaches and increased, targeted investments from both international donors and governments in high-prevalence countries. The funding that is currently available is nowhere near enough to match the scale of child marriage worldwide.
- States must ensure that national legislation is passed and enforced that prohibits CEFMU and makes 18 the minimum age of marriage for both boys and girls, without exception.
- States must repeal discriminatory laws and regulations that prohibit pregnant girls from attending school and, instead, provide adequate support and services for child mothers during and after their pregnancy, as well as access to quality and inclusive education. Helping married girls and child mothers to re-enter the education system is critical.
- Children and young people should be recognized and supported as partners and agents of change in the eradication of child marriage.

Steps to Engage and Mobilize Community to End Child, Early and Forced Marriage

1. **Community selection:** examine multiple locations where interventions to end child, early and forced marriage may be implemented to benefit both the leadership and the community in general.
2. **Community organization:** bring people together to collectively address the issue of child, early and forced marriage in the selected community. With the power of collective action, community organizing can achieve remarkable results that benefit everyone.
3. **Community action:** build social relationships or engage with community stakeholders in pursuit of actions that challenge or counter child, early and forced marriage in the selected community.

Discussion Questions about Child, Early and Forced Marriage

1. *Is Child, Early and Forced Marriage a moral issue?*

Child and forced marriage represent a violation of virtually all human rights and it equally deprives women and girls of autonomy and choice over their bodies and their lives.

2. *What factors lead to Child, Early and Forced Marriage?*

Forced marriage is associated with women's transgression of traditional gender roles, rape, as well as traditions and practices that consider women's opinions and consent as unnecessary. Forced marriages are less common now than they were in the past because of the greater awareness of women's rights.

3. *Who are the main victims of forced marriage?*

Forced marriage is primarily, but not exclusively, a question of violence against women. The majority of victims are young women and girls between the ages of thirteen and thirty. Where the young person is under eighteen it is also a case of child abuse.

4. *What are the mental effects of forced marriage?*

Common psychological effects of forced marriage are feelings of depressed mood, irritability, low self-esteem, rage and frustration, sleep problems, difficulty in forming relationships and difficulty trusting others.

5. *How do you stop child, early and forced marriage?*

Contact the Women Cell of the local police department of the community you are in, lodging a written or oral complaint against your own parents for forcing you into a marriage for which you did not give your free consent without undue influence or force.

6. *Who is at risk of forced marriage?*

Children known to be at risk of forced marriage are likely to be the victims of Domestic Abuse, Violence and Sexual Abuse. Anyone forced into marriage are at increased risk of rape and sexual abuse as they may not consent, including, not being at the legal age to consent to a sexual relationship.

7. *What is another name for forced marriage?*

Synonyms, antonyms, and words related to forced marriage are: compulsory marriage, forcible wedlock, and shotgun marriage.

8. *What is the difference between forced and arranged marriage?*

An arranged marriage occurs in many cultures and often involves an introduction by a family member. The individuals have a choice at all times and the marriage will only go ahead with the full consent of both parties. If a person feels pressured or is expected to marry against their wishes, this is a forced marriage.

9. *What is a forced relationship called?*

Domestic abuse, also called "domestic violence" or "intimate partner violence", can be defined as a pattern of behavior in any relationship that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner.

10. *What faith or religion encourages child, early and forced marriage?*

Forced marriage is not an issue that is specific to any religion, ethnic group or culture. Every major faith or religion condemns forced marriage. Freely given consent is a prerequisite of Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh marriages.

ONSITE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND DIALOGUE WORKSHOP

Introduction of the Workshop:

- ◆ Introduce the purpose of the Workshop to all the participants.
- ◆ Introduce FIIDI Team members / volunteers and the Facilitators.
- ◆ Introduce the Participants
- ◆ Identify objectives and actions that will help achieve the purpose of the workshop.
- ◆ Introduce the next steps in the workshop.
- ◆ Answer questions from the participants for clarity before the workshop starts.
- ◆ Organizational Matters (tell the participants what they should expect – selection of representatives who will represent FIIDI in their communities, transport refund etc.)
- ◆ Housekeeping announcements (phones off or silent, hand up if you have a question etc.)

Welcome Statement:

- ◆ Greet and welcome all participants to the Workshop.
- ◆ Introduce the Mandate (Vision & Mission) of FIIDI to all the participants.
- ◆ Thank all the participants for attending the Workshop.

Discussion and priorities:

- ◆ Ask the participants to explain in their own words what is Child, Early and Forced Marriage?
- ◆ Ask the participants to explain their experience on Child, Early and Forced Marriage in their communities.
- ◆ Ask the participants - how can they work together to end Child, Early and Forced Marriage?

Engagement and dialogue session:

- ◆ Allow participants to engage in group discussions and dialogue to come up with ideas (action points) that they think will end child, early and forced marriage in their communities.

The way forward & Closing Remarks:

- ◆ What specifically is going to happen between FIIDI and the participants after the Workshop?
- ◆ Encourage participants to engage with their communities on Child, Early and Forced Marriage.
- ◆ Thank all participants for attending the Workshop and give them their transport refund.
- ◆ Remind all the participants to wait after the Workshop to take a Group Photo with the Banner.