



BRIEF

A feminist vision on gender-transformative approaches for preventing child marriage and addressing the needs of married girls

PARTNERS

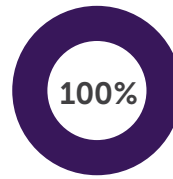
The Women's Refugee Commission
Rozaria Memorial Trust
King's College London



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Participatory action research using consensus-building methods was conducted from 2021-22 with feminist and women-led civil society organisations, experts, and practitioners to learn how best to end child marriage and support already married girls in forcibly displaced and crisis-affected communities in East Africa. This brief summarises findings on using a gender-transformative approach that study participants identified as a priority for **preventing child marriage and meeting the needs of married girls**. At their heart, gender-transformative approaches shift the power relationships between women and men at all levels of society through social activism towards the realisation of gender equality. Direct quotes from participants are included in italics throughout the brief. For additional details about the study, this brief can be read in conjunction with a separate brief outlining the research process.

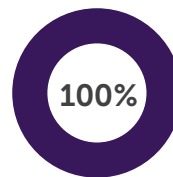
CONSENSUS DATA FROM GRASSROOTS FEMINIST ACTORS IN EAST AFRICA



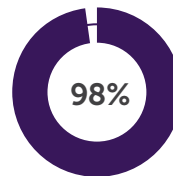
Agree that empowering girls, young women and young mothers is an essential component of child marriage prevention programming.



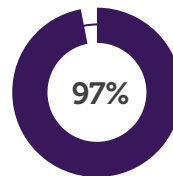
Agree that utilising a gender-transformative approach is essential for confronting power dynamics and transforming harmful gender norms to successfully prevent child marriage.



Collaborate across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus to advocate for gender equality.



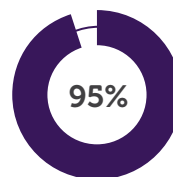
Agree that using a girls-centred approach is essential for preventing child marriage and transforming gender norms.



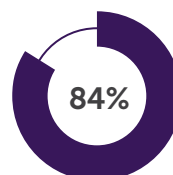
Agree that collaboration across sectors and across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus is essential for empowering girls, young women and young mothers.



Agree that collaboration across sectors and across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus is essential for utilising a gender-transformative approach.



Agree that collaboration across sectors and across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus is essential for ensuring that the voices of girls and women are elevated at all social ecological levels and within community, national, regional and global spaces.



Agree that girl-friendly schools require gender-transformative approaches that enhance education quality and retention, and expand girls' reach and potential.



WHY IS A GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH ESSENTIAL FOR PREVENTING CHILD MARRIAGE, MEETING THE NEEDS OF MARRIED GIRLS AND TRANSFORMING HARMFUL GENDER NORMS?

- Child marriage is the result of gender inequality and patriarchy. Gender-transformative approaches push for long-lasting and structural *'change that empowers girls and women in all their diversity and really achieves gender equality'*.
- Girls who are at risk of experiencing child marriage confront a multitude of oppressions that require long-term strategic action to achieve social change. A gender-transformative approach goes *'beyond preventing child marriage'* and invests into the *'wholeness of a girl or young woman's life'* by facilitating gender equality in all spaces at all levels.
- Promoting positive gender relationships will enable girls to exercise and own their rights, and will create long-lasting change that empowers other girls within the community.

RECOMMENDED PRACTICE

Gender-transformative approaches often seek to raise awareness on the *'rights of children, women and girls through targeting parents, local leaders and girls themselves'*. Many participants found this approach has proved successful in addressing child marriage through community engagement to further *'understand and challenge the existing social norms that perpetuate inequalities between men and women, or boys and girls, as well as engaging all stakeholders to support girls' decisions to stay at school and delay early marriages'*.

Gender-transformative approaches also include individual/group-focused empowerment work with girls. Ninety-four percent (94%) of our participants agreed that empowering married girls is essential so they are able to voice their needs and wishes and are involved in the decisions that affect their lives. The act of 'empowering' was described as girls *'understanding their rights and advocacy skills... so that girls can stand up and speak out when their rights are infringed'*.

Investment in the voices and agency of girls and young women is also needed to *'build the blocks'* for a *'sustainable feminist movement'* in the future as these girls mature into potential leaders, wives, mothers and grandmothers.

CRITICAL ISSUES

A gender-transformative approach recognises girls as active decision-makers and amplifies their voices. As part of a gender-transformative approach, it is important to shift power to girls and women within programming. Participants noted that having girls and young women in leadership roles whilst *'resourcing the priorities that they [girls and young women] find most useful'* complements a gender-transformative and girl-centred approach. It is also important to recognise *'the complexity of layers of discrimination and oppression (race, class, gender, disability, identity)'* that also require transformation.

Gendered power relationships will not be transformed without commitment from, and collaboration with, all sectors involved in addressing child marriage at all levels. However, violence against women, gender inequality and patriarchy are not always recognised or prioritised as key drivers of child marriage by all sectors. Our participants view collaboration across sectors and the nexus as an opportunity to address child marriage through promoting gender equality and strengthening the voice of girls.

LEARNINGS FOR ACTION

- Grassroots feminist organisations play a key role in advocating for, and leading, gender transformative approaches to address child marriage and require continued capacity building and support to do this more effectively at scale.
- Collaboration and joint working across sectors and the humanitarian-development-peace nexus is essential for increasing the use of gender-transformative approaches to address child marriage across different sectors and thereby empowering girls, young women, and young mothers at scale.
- Attention should be paid to working alongside girls and women facing *'different experiences and realities'* in various contexts using a gender-transformative and intersectional approach that recognises multiple forms of oppression and discrimination.