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## The Girl Summit

On the 22nd July 2014, the UK Government and UNICEF are hosting the Girl Summit (the Summit) that aims to tackle female genital mutilation (FGM) and child, early and forced marriage (CEFM). The Summit follows on from previous 'development moments' the UK Government has held (in 2012 on family planning and 2013 on nutrition). The Summit is the first international forum to look at these two issues together, and to bring together an international and UK domestic focus.

The UK Department for International Development (DFID) has increased its focus on empowering women and girls in recent years especially under the leadership of the Rt. Hon. Justine Greening as Secretary of State and Lynne Featherstone MP as Minister. Whilst the issues of CEFM and FGM have recently gained more prominence in the UK, there is comparatively limited awareness and action internationally. The Summit will therefore focus on sharing successful approaches, and aims to secure new commitments from governments, civil society, faith leaders and the private sector.

### Activities and aims for the summit

The summit has three main aims in terms of outcomes:

- Sharing what works - learning and celebrating success through sessions on particular approaches or aspects of combatting FGM and CEFM.
- Agreeing an agenda for change - securing commitments to action through a charter which governments and other attendees will sign up to.
- Engaging people for change - inspiring a generation to declare support to end CEFM and FGM.

There are various events planned in addition to the main summit:

- On Saturday 19 July, a youth focused event #youthforchange, led by Plan UK, will be held which will feed into the main summit.
- On Sunday 20 July, the Nike Foundation is organising a public event – Girl Effect Live, aimed at engaging youth in East London.
- On Monday 21 July, DFID is hosting a research day and Orchid Project are hosting a reception.
- A public campaign is asking for pledged support via Facebook and Twitter: <http://www.girlsummitpledge.com/>

### Who will be at the summit

The summit will be attended by around 400 representatives from governments, civil society, the private sector and foundations from affected countries and northern countries where diaspora communities are affected. There will be a focus on Southern

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leadership and on raising the prominence of these issues beyond countries and actors which have traditionally been engaged.

The UK Government will be represented through the Home Office and DFID, and UNICEF will co-host with the UK Government.

The summit is invitation only, civil society invitations have been sent to the CEO or Director level, in order to enquire about attendance you can email [GirlsSummit2014@DFID.gov.uk](mailto:GirlsSummit2014@DFID.gov.uk)

## Civil society engagement

There have been a number of consultation meetings between UK civil society organisations and the UK government, including roundtable discussions and workshops. A request for content to be presented at the summit was also made available. A reference group of UK based civil society organisations, with a mixture of international and domestic focuses was set up to advise and consult on the content of the summit (members included the Orchid Project, Plan UK, Girls not Brides, Southall Black Sisters, NSPCC, Daughters of Eve, End FGM Social Change Campaign, Restless Development, Save the Children and Karma Nirvana).

## The issues; causes, consequences and approaches

### Definitions

**Female genital mutilation (FGM)** is defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as "all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons"<sup>1</sup>.

**Child early and forced marriage (CEFM)** includes any marriage without the consent of one or both parties where there is emotional or physical coercion. Early marriage refers to unions where one or both parties are children or under 18<sup>2</sup>.

**Child Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM):** Girls married early are more likely to experience **violence**, abuse and forced sexual relations, and reduced levels of sexual and reproductive **health**. Girls who are married under the age of 18 often suffer from malnutrition and have higher maternal and infant mortality rates than those who are in their 20s when married, as they often have children before they are physically ready<sup>3</sup>. The vast majority of girls who become wives drop out of **school** early, or never attend,

<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.forwarduk.org.uk/key-issues/fgm/human-rights>

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.plan-uk.org/because-i-am-a-girl/about-because-i-am-a-girl/violence-against-girls/early-and-forced-marriage>

<sup>3</sup> UNFPA (2013) *Marrying Too Young*

adversely affecting their economic choices for the rest of their lives. Girls who are out of school are highly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

Frequently, a young girl is married to a much older man. She is then unlikely to develop a good emotional or sexual relationship with him and is at risk of developing HIV from her husband, who may have had multiple sexual partners<sup>4</sup>.

CEFM is a practice deeply rooted in social values and norms, and is often the result of pressures caused by poverty and lack of alternative economic opportunities available to women. Conflict, disaster and emergency situations can also increase the incidence of CEFM, as economic pressures are increased and families which would not previously have considered early marriage use it as a last resort<sup>5</sup>. Protection networks are also broken down and some families see early marriage as a form of protection from sexual violence. Unfortunately girls who are married in this context can be at greater risk of violence, malnutrition and serious health complications<sup>6</sup>.

**Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)** has devastating and long lasting health, psychological and emotional consequences for women and girls, and may even result in disability or death. Consequences include haemorrhaging and shock at the time of the cut, problems with urination and menses, and obstetric complications<sup>7</sup>. Sexual intercourse for women who have undergone FGM is often painful, undermining women's right to pursue a satisfying, safe and pleasurable sexual life.

Girls are usually cut before age 12, and FGM in some contexts is a precursor to CEFM<sup>8</sup>. FGM persists because it is a social norm, linked with marriageability, which ensures that it continues, although the health consequences may be severe. It is estimated that three million girls a year are currently at risk.<sup>9</sup>

**Human rights violations:** Both FGM and CEFM violate girls' and women's basic Human Rights and can cause life-long pain and trauma. They are identified as harmful practices in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 24(3)), and in the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (Articles 2, 5 and 16)<sup>10</sup>. Article 5(a) of CEDAW calls for States to take "all appropriate measures to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women."<sup>11</sup>

<sup>4</sup> UNFPA (2013) *Marrying Too Young*

<sup>5</sup> Plan (2011) *Breaking Vows: Early and Forced Marriage and Girls' Education*

<sup>6</sup> World Vision (2013) *Untying the Knot: Exploring Early Marriage in Fragile States*

<sup>7</sup> WHO, (2013) *Fact sheet N°241: Female Genital Mutilation,*

<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/>

<sup>8</sup> World Vision (2014) *Exploring the Links: Female Genital Mutilation/ Cutting and Early Marriage*

<sup>9</sup> See <http://orchidproject.org/category/about-fgc/what-is-fgc/>

<sup>10</sup> See <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/cedaw.htm>

<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/cedaw.htm>

**Broader context:** CEFM and FGM should not be viewed in isolation; they are both a cause and a consequence of gender inequality and are forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG). They are an abuse of the power imbalance between women and men and a means of social control reinforcing women's subordinate status. Sometimes known as 'harmful traditional practices' FGM and CEFM are products of discriminatory social norms - shared expectations of specific individuals or groups regarding how people should behave. Norms act as powerful motivators either for or against individual attitudes and behaviours, largely because individuals who deviate from group expectations are subject to shaming, sanctions or disapproval by others.

**Tackling root causes:** In the experience of some GADN members, efforts to address FGM and CEFM will most effective if they focus on tackling the root causes of FGM and CEFM; including addressing discriminatory social norms and broader gender inequality. This should include measures to empower women and girls; as well as efforts to mobilise communities to reject FGM and CEFM.

**Women's rights organisations:** Women's rights organisations play a key role in addressing all forms of VAWG. This is supported by recent findings of a four-decade research effort in 70 countries, which found that the mobilisation of women's rights movements is more important for combating violence against women than the wealth of nations, left-wing political parties, or the number of women politicians<sup>12</sup>. In addition, women's rights organisations often have a fuller understanding of local social and political structures that put women and girls at risk and have found ways of negotiating plural legal systems to women's advantage and of appropriating international human rights standards into local practices. They are also well placed to tackle forms of violence justified by ideas of 'culture' or 'religion' and to successfully do this within the parameters of cultural framings rather than outside of it, which can reduce resistance in the long-term.<sup>13</sup>

**Survivor-centred and empowering approach:** Interventions should integrate women's and girls' own experiences and input within all initiatives and strategies to ensure the approach is empowering. In addition, governments, faith leaders, private sector and NGOs should commit to taking a survivor-centred approach to FGM and CEFM programmes and policies – this includes respecting women and girls' autonomy and right to make decisions.

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<sup>12</sup> Htun, M. and Weldon, L. (2012) 'The Civic Origins of Progressive Policy Change: Combating Violence against Women in Global Perspective, 1975–2005', *American Political Science Review*, Cambridge University Press and the American Political Science Association

<sup>13</sup> UK Government, (2012) *A Practical Guide on Community Programming on Violence Against Women and Girls*

## Recommendations:

GADN supports the focus of the summit on improving the understanding of what works, and gaining specific commitments for action. In addition we recommend the following:

1. **The Summit should recognise and tackle the full spectrum of violence faced by girls and young women alongside CEFM and FGM.**
2. **Commitments made at the Summit should fully recognise the invaluable role played by women's rights organisations in the fight against CEFM, FGM and all forms of violence against women and girls and pledge to fund them accordingly. Funding streams should be made accessible including by simplifying grants application, monitoring and reporting processes.**
3. **Commitments made at the Summit should seek to empower girls and women as a crucial element in achieving gender equality and tackling FGM and CEFM.**
4. **As well as focusing on prevention, commitments made at the Summit should address the need for survivor centred approaches involving these women and girls in the design, implementation and evaluation of approaches.**
5. **All governments attending the Summit should commit to supporting a standalone goal on gender equality and women's rights in the post-2015 framework and ensure this addresses violence against women, including CEFM and FGM. Gender equality should also be mainstreamed throughout the framework, for example ensuring girls are able to complete a full course of education.**

## Further resources and links:

### The summit:

[www.girlsummitpledge.com](http://www.girlsummitpledge.com)

[www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/girl-summit-2014](http://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/girl-summit-2014)

[www.gov.uk/government/news/calling-all-young-people-youthforchange](http://www.gov.uk/government/news/calling-all-young-people-youthforchange)

### Reports:

GADN (2013) *Harmful Traditional Practices: Your Questions, Our Answers*

IPPF (2007) *Ending Child Marriage*

Plan (2011) *Breaking Vows: Early and Forced Marriage and Girls' Education*

UNICEF (2013) *Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: A Statistical Overview and Exploration of the Dynamics of Change*

UNFPA (2012) *Marrying Too Young*

World Vision (2013) *Untying the Knot: Exploring Early Marriage in Fragile States*

World Vision (2014) *Exploring the Links: Female Genital Mutilation/ Cutting and Early Marriage*

## Websites

FORWARD: [www.forwarduk.org.uk](http://www.forwarduk.org.uk)

Girls Not Brides: [www.girlsnotbrides.org](http://www.girlsnotbrides.org)

28 Too Many: [www.28toomany.org](http://www.28toomany.org)

Orchid Project: [www.orchidproject.org](http://www.orchidproject.org)

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The Gender & Development Network (GADN) brings together expert NGOs, consultants, academics and individuals committed to working on gender, development and women's rights issues. Our vision is of a world where social justice and gender equality prevail and where all women and girls are able to realise their rights free from discrimination. Our goal is to ensure that international development policy and practice promotes gender equality and women's and girls' rights. Our role is to support our members by sharing information and expertise, to undertake and disseminate research, and to provide expert advice and comment on government policies and projects.

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Registered charity no. 1140272

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