

South Asia Parliamentarians' Meeting on Child Marriage

“Accelerating our Collective Efforts to End Child Marriage”

22-23 March 2016, Kathmandu, Nepal

Introduction

Child marriage is a violation of human rights. It is a complex issue driven by a number of factors in different societies. Gender inequality, however, stands out as a determinant factor, which is caused by entrenched societal differentiation between males and females based on traditional norms, religion, economic status, class, ethnicity, caste, sexuality, HIV status, and disability among others.

Despite national laws and international agreements banning it, child marriage remains pervasive. It presents a threat to children's healthy lives and well-being, especially girls, in more than a hundred countries. Child marriage remains one of the most formidable causes of maternal mortality, despite a commendable worldwide decline on average by nearly half since 1990. Child marriage deprives girls of opportunities and rights to education, employment and fulfillment of their potential throughout their life course. The practice remains widespread due in part to persistent poverty in addition to gender inequality. In developing countries, one in every three girls is married before reaching age 18.

Enforcement of laws and policies remains weak for various reasons. Laws which touch upon social issues are least enforced. Where laws have criminalized child marriage, very few prosecutions have been followed through. Policy frameworks are often unknown to a greater segment of the population. Effective implementation of laws and policies has also been hampered by lack of adequate financial, human and material resources.

In collaboration with the Nepalese Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (NFPPD), the Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (AFPPD) is organizing “South Asia Parliamentarians' Meeting on Child Marriage.” The meeting will provide an opportunity for parliamentarians facing similar situations and challenges to exchange their experiences and knowledge on child marriage. Best practices on eliminating child marriage and effective models of monitoring systems, such as through national and sub-national action plans, will be shared. The meeting is intended to encourage parliamentarians and key stakeholders to examine existing laws and policies, to reflect how best they can be put into action, and recommend how the prevention of child marriage and other harmful practices can be better addressed in national policies and programmes.

Overall objective

The overall objective of this meeting is to accelerate parliamentarians' efforts both nationally and sub-regionally to eliminate child marriage, thereby promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. The meeting also intends to enhance exchange and learning among parliamentarians to have better understanding of how to build preventive mechanisms into legislation, thus promoting gender responsive policies and legislation in their respective countries.

Expected results

- AFPPD and NFPPD will provide a platform for parliamentarians to obtain information on evidence-based policy development based on good practices and parliamentary strategies for effective implementation of laws and policies to prevent child marriage, and such information will be shared between parliamentarians.

- Members of parliaments including high-level decision makers (e.g. Speakers and several Chairs of Committees) will have increased their knowledge about, understanding of, and commitment to ending child marriage through sub-regional cooperation and south-south collaboration.
- Sub-regional action plan will be developed for parliamentary cooperation to accelerate their efforts to prevent and end child marriage.

Dates and venue

The meeting will be held in Kathmandu, Nepal on 22-23 March 2016.

Target audience/participants

45 participants comprising parliamentarians from selected countries, associated civil society organizations and regional partners.

- 20 Parliamentarians as nominated by AFPPD national committees from South Asia
- 10 parliamentarians as members of (i) AFPPD Standing Committee on Investing in Youth and (ii) AFPPD Standing Committee on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
- 10 representatives from associated civil society organizations and regional partners including donors and UN Agencies.
- 5 Secretariat staff of AFPPD and NFPPD

Format

The meeting will consist of resource persons' presentations, interactive panel discussions and open discussions. The meeting will use participatory formats as much as possible, to create the opportunities for inclusive and diverse conversations on child marriage and gender equality and women's empowerment. Member countries of both Standing Committees from other regions will be encouraged to share experiences to promote south-south collaboration.

To encourage collaborative efforts by participating parliamentarians and key stakeholders, the declaration will be drafted and presented highlighting main points and ideas raised as well as some recommendations and commitments made by the participants.

Co-organizers

- The Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (AFPPD)
- The Nepalese Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (NFPPD)