



# RELIGIOUS LEADERS WORKSHOPS



Norwegian Ministry  
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**Designed by:** Hugo Balandra

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# CEFM: RELIGIOUS LEADERS WORKSHOPS TOOL

## WORKSHOP FOR RELIGIOUS LEADERS ON CHILD, EARLY AND FORCED MARRIAGE (CEFM) <sup>1</sup>

This manual is part of a holistic programme, called ENGAGE, for preventing, mitigating, and responding to child, early and forced marriage (CEFM) through community outreach and gender-based violence (GBV) response service provision. *ENGAGE – Enhancing Girl’s Agency and Gender Equality Programme*, aims to empower and provide additional support to adolescent girls, mobilise families and communities, whilst improving the capacity of frontline workers.

## OBJECTIVES

The religious leader’s sessions are organised as a series of workshops with emphasis on gaining input and insight from religious leaders and viewing them specifically as agents of change in their communities.

## INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES:

- Families, religious leaders, communities and young people are aware of the harmful impacts of CEFM
- Families, religious leaders, communities and young people support gender equality and challenge harmful gender norms
- Families, religious leaders, communities and young people value and support alternatives to CEFM

## LONG-TERM OUTCOMES:

- Community, traditional & religious leaders take greater action to end child marriage (including refusing to marry girls)
- Families, religious leaders, communities and young people support gender equality and challenge harmful gender norms
- Men and boys prefer not to marry girls who are still children

<sup>1</sup> Depending on the level of technical capacity teachers possess on these topics, utilise the other sections of the manual to enhance skills prior to these sessions. It is recommended teachers level of information about puberty and hygiene is assessed around reflective sessions that also discuss pressures teachers face in their own lives due to gender inequality.

## TOOL STRUCTURE

The 'Religious Leaders Workshops' tool is intended to assist facilitators through each session, as they engage with the religious actors.

The 'Religious Leaders Workshops' are optional and should only be implemented in contexts where programmes work with a strong faith-based partner or resource persons, who have experience working with religious texts and with religious actors on sensitive topics. Moreover, the facilitators should understand the concepts of gender-based violence, early and forced marriage, before commencing implementation. This tool is intended to be a flexible, modular approach rather than a prescriptive manual.

The religious leaders' workshops consist of 7 sessions to be delivered every two weeks (1 session every second week for 14 weeks). However, the timing for the workshops should be determined by the availability of the religious leaders. Approximately 10-15 religious leaders can participate in the workshop. They can be organised as single faith or multi-faith workshops, according to the context and expertise of the facilitators. (Refer to the **ENGAGE Implementation Guide** for additional guidance on targeting and recruiting participants, scheduling activities and sessions and key tips for engaging religious leaders.)

### STRUCTURE OF SESSIONS

	Session	Objectives	Time required
SESSION 1	Introduction to the Programme	Participants familiarise themselves with each other and the programme	2 hours
		Establish group behaviour norms	
		Consider their own values, attitudes and beliefs	
		Reflect on the difference between gender and sex.	
SESSION 2	Gender, power and restrictions on adolescent girls	Explore attitudes and norms that contribute to child, early and forced marriage	2 hours 15 mins

SESSION 3	Child marriage in our community	<p>Reflect on the risks and benefits of child marriage</p> <p>Begin to develop ideas for how to support community members to change their attitudes and beliefs about when a girl is ready for marriage and why girls should take part in decisions that affect their lives.</p>	1 hour 45 mins
SESSION 4	What our religion says on CEFM	Review, discuss and refine messages from their religion that promote healthy marriage practices and support caregivers' understanding on the importance of waiting until their children are at least 18 years old to marry.	2 hours
SESSION 5	Honour/reputation and sexuality in our society	Gain insight about the concept of honour/reputation and sexuality in their society, and the impact of these practices, especially on adolescent girls	2 hours
SESSION 6	Our role in preventing CEFM in the community	Reflect on their role in influencing positive constructions of masculinity for boys and fathers in their communities in order to prevent CEFM.	2 hours 20 mins
SESSION 7	Planning conversations with our congregation on CEFM	Develop and practice applying key messages to use as sermons or conversation starters with congregation members.	2 hours

# SESSION 1

## INTRODUCTION TO THE PROGRAMME<sup>2</sup>

🕒 Time required: 2 hours

### 🎯 SESSION AIMS

By the end of the session, participants will:

- Familiarise themselves with each other and the programme
- Establish group behaviour norms
- Consider their own values, attitudes and beliefs
- Reflect on the difference between gender and sex.

### 🔍 OVERVIEW


ACTIVITY	TIME ALLOCATED
1.1. Getting to know each other and creating a safe space for discussion	45 min
1.2. Voting exercise	45 min
1.3. Getting to know the programme and discussion expectations	30 min


<sup>2</sup> Adapted from CARE USA. "Facilitator's Manual for Religious Leaders: CARE's Tipping Point Phase 2." Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere, Inc., 2019., [https://caretippingpoint.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/FM\\_Religious\\_Leaders\\_Group\\_14Aug2020.pdf](https://caretippingpoint.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/FM_Religious_Leaders_Group_14Aug2020.pdf), page 16-23 and International Rescue Committee, Engaging Men through Accountable Practice, <https://gbvresponders.org/prevention/emap-tools-resources/>, page 92.


## 1.1. GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER AND CREATING A SAFE SPACE FOR DISCUSSION (45 MINS)

### MATERIALS AND PREPARATION:

- Prepare small pieces of tape, enough for each participant to tape a name tag onto their shirt or, if there are resources available, purchase name tag badges for each of the participants.
- Flipchart with heading “Characteristics of a Safe Space”.
- Leave a blank piece of flipchart paper open on the flipchart stand or wall.

 **DO:** Warmly welcome participants to the first workshop of the religious leaders and explain the process.

 **SAY:** Today we begin an incredible journey together. It is a journey of self-reflection, growth, and change for ourselves as individuals, as leaders, and as community members. I will be here to guide the process. However, it is your participation that will propel us forward. Each of us brings something unique to this space—our character, our ideas, and our experiences. Your contributions are what will enrich this process and give it meaning. Therefore, it is important that we get to know each other and that we get comfortable together, as we embark upon this journey together.

 **EXPLAIN:** to the participants that there are a total of 7 workshops that they will have together over the course of 14 weeks. Each workshop is approximately 2 hours. Emphasise the importance to commit to attend all seven workshops and not to miss one, as the participation of each member is critical, where the absence of one negates the attendance of others. Explain to the group the schedule of the 7 workshops.

 **DO:**

- ✔ Divide participants into pairs.
- ✔ Let participants know that they will each have five minutes to tell their partner as much as possible about themselves.
- ✔ When 10 minutes are up, ask participants to come back together.
- ✔ Give each participant a chance to introduce her/his partner and describe what s/he learnt about her/his partner during the activity. After each introduction, allow the person who was introduced to correct or add any information about her/himself.



☑ **DO:**

- ☑ Write on a flipchart paper: “Creating a Safe Space”.
- ☑ Invite participants to share what “safe” means for them. Take a couple of responses.

☑ **DO:** Ask all participants to close their eyes. Once everyone’s eyes are closed, read the following guided imagery. Read it very slowly so that participants have time to imagine many details. When you see the word “pause” stop and let a few seconds pass. Do not rush.

*“Think about a time when you felt very safe sharing personal information with an individual or group. (pause) Try to remember the details of that time. Who were you with? What personal information were you sharing? (pause) Think about what made you feel so safe. Did you feel safe automatically or did that person say or do something to make you feel safe? (pause) Did you have any concerns about sharing personal information? If so, what were those concerns? (pause) What helped you to get over those concerns and feel more comfortable to share? (pause) How did you feel after you shared the personal information? (pause) Did it help you in some way to share the information? How did it affect your relationship with the individual or group to share personal information about yourself?”*

🗨️ Bring participants attention back to the main group and **ASK:**

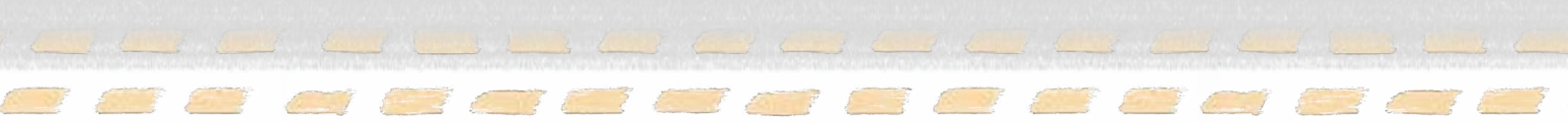
- ❓ Based on the experiences that you’ve reflected on, what do you feel are the characteristics of a safe space?

☑ **DO:**

- ☑ Write participants’ responses on the flipchart entitled “Characteristics of a Safe Space.”
- ☑ Probe as needed to fully understand their ideas. For example, if someone says ‘confidentiality’, ask them what they mean by ‘confidentiality’.
- ☑ Explore what behaviours create a safe space in which we feel comfortable to share personal thoughts, feelings and stories.

**Examples include:**

- Confidentiality (keeping things secret or private)
- Non-judgmental behaviour (supporting people rather than looking down upon them. Not judging their opinions or ideas)
- Open communication (everyone is free to speak about their feelings without fear of repercussions. People discuss problems or issues directly rather than behind someone’s back)

- 
- D.** Commitment (everyone shows equal commitment to creating a safe space and to the process. You can trust and rely upon others.)
  - E.** Honesty (everyone tries to be as honest as possible about their views and experiences)
  - F.** Trust (trust is usually built by combining the characteristics above)



**SUMMARISE** the following key points:

Although we are all different, there is a commonality in what creates a safe space for all of us. Throughout the process of reflection, we will be committed to make sure that we create safe spaces for ourselves, our peers and communities as well. Although we do not have complete control over what people think, say, do or believe, we all can and must contribute to making this space as safe as possible. The safer the space, the more powerful and rewarding this process will be.

## 1.2. VOTING EXERCISE (45 MINS)

### MATERIALS AND PREPARATION:

- Prepare two cards with “agree” and “disagree”. If working with non-literate groups, decide together on symbols that depict the feeling of “agree”, for example a tick or a happy face/sad face and like a X for “disagree” .
- Select and write the statements on cards/paper in advance: (may wish to select 6-8 statements based on time available)
  - *A girl of any age can give consent for her marriage.*
  - *Friendship between an adolescent boy and girl should be avoided as neighbours will gossip.*
  - *Women are better parents than men.*
  - *If the family has limited resources, male children should be prioritised for schooling.*
  - *To marry well, girls must learn how to do housework.*
  - *A woman is incomplete if she does not have children.*
  - *If a girl is not married by 20, then she is probably not a good girl for marriage.*
  - *It is not the job of fathers to talk to their daughters about menstruation and puberty.*
  - *Love is not the most important ingredient in a happy marriage.*
  - *If one does not get married, they are not normal.*
  - *A man should have the final word about decisions in his home, including when his daughter should get married and to whom.*

#### **Sensitive statements to be contextualised for your context:**

- *A girl's honour should be protected at all costs, even if it means marriage against her will.*
- *A girl is ready for marriage when she has begun menstruation.*


#### **DO:**

Place the ‘agree/disagree’ cards at opposite ends of the space (either on a wall or on the ground), so that everyone can see them with enough space for people to be able to move to either side.

 **SAY:**


- This is a group learning exercise, where everyone in the group gets to have their opinion on statements and reflect on their own attitudes around commonly held beliefs. The objective is to understand the diversity of opinions and give everyone an opportunity to reflect on their own attitudes around commonly held beliefs.
- It is important that we show each other respect and refrain from judging, interrupting or ridiculing others.
- Our values and attitudes are not “right” or “wrong”. They are simply the lens through which we view our world.

 **DO:**

- ✔ From the list of statements above, read one statement.
- ✔ Ask participants to reflect quietly (without discussing with one another) on their own attitude or opinion about the statement, and then move to the card that represents their opinion (agree/disagree).  **NOTE:** *If this is not suitable with the religious leaders, you can simply ask them to raise their hand when they agree to the statement.*
- ✔ Once all participants have moved or answered, ask them to discuss with those near them why they have chosen to agree or disagree with the statement, if they feel comfortable.
- ✔ Invite participants of each group to share their reason for agreement/disagreement.

 **ASK:**

- ❓ Would someone care to share with the other group why they are standing where they are?
- ❓ How does it feel to be in the group they are in?


 **NOTE:** *One group may be small and have just one or two people—ask, how does it feel to be in the minority?*


 **DO:**

- ✔ After hearing the views of each group, ask the participants if anyone would like to change their place and move to a different card. If participants moving would like to share, explore why they are doing so.
- ✔ Remind participants that the objective is not to argue or convince people to change their opinions, but rather to genuinely understand and learn about different opinions.
- ✔ Ask participants if they have any question or clarifications about the points raised during the discussion.


 **ASK** the following reflection questions before the closing and action planning discussion:

- ② Did you learn anything new from this discussion? Any surprises?
- ② What are the advantages of discussing our attitudes?
- ② What was it like to be in a group by yourself or a very small group (2-3 people)? (ask for volunteers who were in that situation).
- ② Did you feel pressured to follow the majority of participants? Why? Why not? (*Make a note that this activity is about our individual opinions, but it also helps to reflect on how the opinions we express are influenced by the opinions of the majority. Often, we see people looking around to find out where people go before they decide*).

 **DO:** Thank participants for their contributions.

 **SUMMARISE** the following key points:

- We all hold positive and negative attitudes that affect us in different ways.
- Our attitudes and values are often contextual and situational – they are not often black and white, so it may not be easy to know how we feel. It is important to notice that everyone does not necessarily hold the same values or opinions on certain issues even though this is what is assumed.
- Thinking about our attitudes is an important opportunity to reflect about what we believe in and want. Many of us today expressed that some of the attitudes that our community holds about child marriage may not be beneficial for girls, families and communities.

 **ASK:** Would you be comfortable, over the course of the next 6 workshops, working together to try to figure out how to address child marriage in your communities?


## 1.3. GETTING TO KNOW THE PROGRAMME AND DISCUSSING EXPECTATIONS (30 MINS)


### MATERIALS AND PREPARATION:


- Prepare four different flipcharts with the titles:
  1. Change in Ourselves
  2. Change in Our Relationships
  3. Change in Our Families
  4. Change in Our Communities


Hang the four flipcharts in order next to each other on a side wall of the training room. Leave some space between them for participants to gather. (If they do not all fit on one wall then you can use another wall space).


- Prepare two flipcharts, one with the title: “What’s Exciting/Interesting!” and the other with the title: “What Concerns Us”. Hang the flipcharts on the flipchart stand/wall.
- Have a large stack of small blank cards/papers available (approximately A5 size, sometimes called “VIPP” cards), enough for at least 4 per participant.
- Put markers and piles of A5/VIPP cards on the tables or floor near participants.


 **DO:** Gather participants back to the semi-circle after doing an ice-breaker.

 **SAY:** Today we are going to begin an important journey together. Like any journey, before we get going, we first have to know where we’re going! In this session, we’re going to think about why we are here and where are we heading. What do we hope to achieve? How? What are our hopes? Expectations? Concerns? The road ahead will be exciting, challenging, rewarding and inspiring. So, let’s get started!

 **EXPLAIN:** to the participants that we are all here to make *changes that we believe are important in our lives and our communities.*

 **ASK:** What kinds of changes they hope to see as a result of this project?



 **EXPLAIN:** that there are four major sections on our path of change (point to the corresponding signs around the room). Invite participants to take a brief walk with you along the path of change.


- Ask participants to get up from their seats and follow you to Flipchart #1 (**Change in Ourselves**). Explain that we start our journey with “Change within Ourselves.” Ask participants what this means to them. Listen to responses from 2-3 participants.


**Summarise** that ‘change within ourselves’ refers to the changes we make as individuals, in our own knowledge, attitudes, skills, and behaviours.


- Lead participants to the 2nd flipchart (**Change in Our Relationships**). Ask participants what this means to them. Listen to responses from 2-3 participants.

**Summarise** that as we make changes within ourselves, we can begin to make changes in our relationships with our husbands/ wives, children.


- Continue in this way to the remaining two flipcharts, (**Change in our families**) and (**Change in our communities**), asking participants what it means to them and summarising the meaning of each.

 **DO:** Return participants to their seats once they have walked through the whole path of change.

 **ASK:** How have you been able to influence change in the communities due to the position you hold? Can you share some examples?

 **SUMMARISE** the following key points:

As we have seen, change is a process that takes place over time. We must start the process of change within ourselves and then can gradually work to make positive changes in our relationships and the community. We will focus on initiating this process of positive change within ourselves. Each of you is here so that you may go through this journey of reflection and learning. We will focus on the changes in our own lives, before focusing on our community. The skills you will gain from these sessions will help you to create a conducive environment for community activism to prevent Child Marriage as well as assist in engaging more to prevent and respond to CEFM in your community.

 **SAY:** You have learnt about the programme and its aims; now we will discuss your expectations and concerns, hear your thoughts and feelings about what’s ahead.

☑ **DO:**

- ☑ Divide participants into pairs.
- ☑ In pairs, participants will reflect upon what they have just learnt about the programme and its objectives.
  - a. *What interests or excites you most about your participation in the programme?*
  - b. *What concerns, if any, do you have about the process?*
- ☑ Each pair should come up with at least one answer per question and write their answers on the cards provided in the language they prefer (one answer per card). Once they are finished, they can hang their cards on the corresponding flipcharts.
- ☑ Assist as needed, make sure that everyone has cards and markers.
- ☑ After all participants have hung their cards, walk to the “What’s Exciting/Interesting!” flipchart. Read participants’ responses and try to draw out similarities and unique elements. Take comments or questions from 1-2 participants.
- ☑ Move to the “What Concerns Us” flipchart. Read participants’ concerns. Try to group them into similar categories.
- ☑ For each of the main concerns, ask participants what you can do as participants and/or the facilitator to address that concern. Take one or two responses for each.

⚠ **NOTE:** *As a facilitator, you may not be able to address some concerns. If you feel the request is something you cannot address, tell the participants that you will discuss with the management team and come back to them about that next time. You should not address something or make a change that you are not comfortable or sure about. You will need to be prepared to answer questions from participants about incentives and certificates, among other issues. Discuss with your supervisor or the project manager beforehand to understand whether participants will be offered incentives and certificates so that you are ready with this information.*

🗨 **ASK:** Are there any expectations or concerns that have not been raised that you would like to discuss?

**CONCLUDE** the session by asking participants to reflect at home about what they have discussed today and come to the next session ready to continue the discussion and reflection process.



# SESSION 2

## GENDER, POWER AND RESTRICTIONS ON ADOLESCENT GIRLS<sup>3</sup>

 Time required: 2 hours 15 mins

### SESSION AIMS

By the end of the session, participants will:

- Explore attitudes and norms that contribute to child, early and forced marriage

### OVERVIEW

ACTIVITY NAME	TIME ALLOCATED
2.1. Gender box	45 min
2.2. Restrictions on adolescent girls	45 min
2.3. Power in our Lives	45 min

### RECAP FROM LAST SESSION:

- Welcome the group to the session, ensuring to include each time context specific greeting formalities.
- Request a few volunteers to summarise the previous session and share their reflections from the reflection exercise assigned at the end of the last session.

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from CARE USA. "Facilitator's Manual for Religious Leaders: CARE's Tipping Point Phase 2." Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere, Inc., 2019., [https://caretippingpoint.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/FM\\_Religious\\_Leaders\\_Group\\_14Aug2020.pdf](https://caretippingpoint.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/FM_Religious_Leaders_Group_14Aug2020.pdf), page 25 and 54 and Michau, L. et. Al. The SASA! Activist Kit for Preventing Violence Against Women and HIV, Start Phase, Prep Training Module, p 27-31. Kampala: Raising Voices, Dec. 2008, <https://raisingvoices.org/sasa/download-sasa/>

## 2.1. GENDER BOX (45 MINS)


### MATERIALS AND PREPARATION:

- Flipchart papers
- Markers
- Paper
- Pencils and pens

#### ASK:


- ? What comes to your mind when you hear the word **'male'**?
- ? What about when you hear the word **'female'**?

 **NOTE:** *Capture the participants responses on a flipchart.*

 **DO:** Divide the chart paper into two with a line down the middle and write 'Sex' on one side 'Gender' on the other. Record participants responses under each.

 **EXPLAIN:** that

- 'Sex' refers to biological traits, that cannot be changed without surgery.
- Gender roles are defined by the society on how women and men are expected to socially behave in that society. Gender refers to the economic, social and cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being male or female at a particular point in time.
- While biological traits cannot be changed, social roles can be changed to be equal and fair for both men and women.

 **SAY:** We are going to discuss the expectations that we have, our friends have, our families have, and our communities have for us as women and men. We will call these expectations our "gender".

☑ **DO:**

- ☑ Divide the participants into women-only and men-only groups. If they are a single sex group, request half of them to work as if they were the other sex (example: women express the views of men if no men are present).
- ☑ Ask each group to draw a medium-sized square and tell them this is a “gender box”. Inside this box, ask the women’s group to draw a “typical” woman and the men’s group to draw a “typical” man.

⚠ **NOTE:** *Instruct the participants to consider characteristics that people in their community consider for a woman describing her as a “good wife” and characteristics of a “good husband” for a man. Alternatively, the facilitator can choose for women to draw a typical man and men to draw a typical woman. This should be decided before the activity begins. For groups with low literacy, the facilitators can support or pair those with higher literacy together to support.*

- ☑ Ask each group to discuss their own experience of the roles, behaviours, and norms that society expects of the “typical” woman and “typical” man and draw symbols or write the key points inside the box.



**FOR WOMEN, EXAMPLES MAY INCLUDE:**

know how to cook well, take care of siblings and small children, have completed basic education, be married before a certain age, have at least one child/son, look beautiful, be a virgin until marriage, not oppose their husbands in public, get married at a young age, etc.



**FOR MEN, EXAMPLES MAY INCLUDE:**

having a job, being sexually experienced, having completed secondary education, being married before a certain age, having a child or a son, be physically strong, control one’s wife, participate in community events, should be older than his wife, etc.

- ☑ Once the lists for “inside the box” are completed, ask the groups: *now discuss what are the people and things that work to keep the women/man in the box.* (Draw an arrow going into the box for each thing/group) where those expectations come from or from where or whom they are learnt. Instruct the group members to write the sources of expectations around the gender box, circling each item or source.

- Example:




- ✓ After groups have listed out expectations of “typical” and “non-typical” attitudes, behaviour, appearance, etc., have one group of men and one group of women present their gender boxes. Invite others of the same sex to add, and then offer the whole group an opportunity to raise clarifications or observations.


#### ASK:

- ? You shared the different roles and expectations from men and women. Are these expectations helpful or beneficial? If so, who do they help and how?
- ? Are these expectations harmful to women and girls? If so, how?
- ? Are these expectations harmful to men and boys? If so, how?
- ? How do the boxes benefit men and boys?
- ? What are the consequences of (both positive and negative) people’s experience when they “step outside” the box? Are the consequences same for men and women?
- ? Is there a cost (in terms of social cost, opportunity cost, financial cost, rights cost, etc.) to these roles, behaviours and norms existing in your community?
- ? Who has more freedom to “step outside” the box? Are there any advantages of being outside of the box?
- ? Do you conform to these expectations of a “typical” woman or man? Why/why not?
- ? When do you choose to “stay in the box” and when do you choose to “step out of the box”? Why?



 **ASK:** What would the world be like without these boxes?

 **EXPLAIN:** that, in the end, characteristics of men and women, who are outside the box, are actually quite similar. In a world where there are no boxes, the characteristics for men and women are the same. Make the point that whether or not we conform, we experience these expectations and for men they are privileges, regardless of how equitable they may be – they may be seen differently, heard differently, paid differently because they are men instead of women.

 **SUMMARISE** the following key points:

- The intention is not for men to behave like women and women to behave like men (*which is the most common push back*); but that men and women should each have an equal choice to decide how they want to behave and how they want their relationships to be.
- This applies to yourselves as well. You have the choice to decide how you want to behave and how your relationships are with your families and within the community. As religious leaders, you are role models in the community. How you behave is important because it will influence how other members of the community behave.
- In a simple example, we are not saying that men will stay home, and women work, we are saying that men and women can decide who does what based on their needs instead of conforming to gender stereotypes.

## 2.2. RESTRICTIONS ON ADOLESCENT GIRLS (45 MINS)

### MATERIALS AND PREPARATION:

- Flipchart papers, markers, a bowl/hat
- Prepare the 6 themes on pieces of folder paper:

**WORK RELATED  
RESTRICTIONS**


**MOBILITY RELATED  
RESTRICTIONS**

**PLAY RELATED  
RESTRICTIONS**

**TIME RELATED  
RESTRICTIONS**


**FOOD RELATED  
RESTRICTIONS**

**MENSTRUATION RELATED  
RESTRICTIONS**

 **SAY:** We have already talked about how much more work women and girls do in the home. Here we will talk about formal, or clearly stated rules, or informal, implied, rules (social norms) and restrictions, which women and girls have to abide by. Explain to the group to focus on these.

#### **DO:**

- ✓ Divide the participants in 6 groups, one for each theme (below).
- ✓ Tell them that they will be given one theme to discuss around the rules or restrictions that women and girls have within their home.

 **NOTE:** Explain that 'rules' means a norm or convention that women and girls have to follow but it may not be clearly stated. For example, in many homes' women eat last in the family or have to eat left-overs. Similarly, girls may have restrictions on when and where they can go. A comparison can be made with men and boys.

- ✓ From a bowl/hat get each group to pick out one theme:

**WORK RELATED  
RESTRICTIONS**

**MOBILITY RELATED  
RESTRICTIONS**

**PLAY RELATED  
RESTRICTIONS**

**TIME RELATED  
RESTRICTIONS**

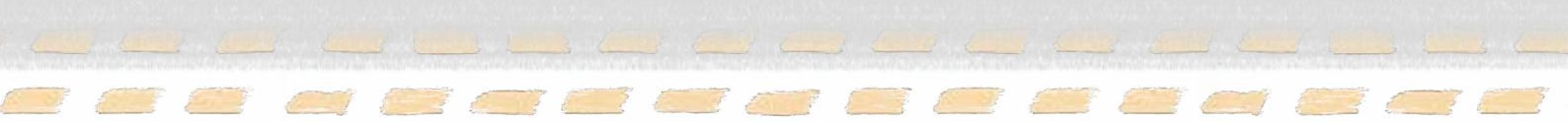
**FOOD RELATED  
RESTRICTIONS**


**MENSTRUATION RELATED  
RESTRICTIONS**

- ✔ Explain that the groups will have 15 minutes to discuss and that each group will have 5 minutes to present back. Begin the group discussion.
- ✔ Ask each group to present. The other groups should add if they feel something is left out during share back. After all six groups have shared, ask them if there are any restrictions that do not fit into these 6 themes, such as listening to their opinion, etc.
- ✔ Ask two volunteers from each group to present their findings in 3 minutes.
- ✔ Using the below questions for guidance (choose only a few questions if timing is restricted), discuss the findings in the larger group.

### Questions for discussion:


- ❓ Do you have any rules about what games girls can play, where and when? Does her brother face the same restrictions?
- ❓ Do girls face restrictions about going out in the evening or night? What is the reason for that?
- ❓ Why is it always girls honour that matters? Why not with boys?
- ❓ Do girls and women face any restrictions during the menstrual period? What are these?
- ❓ Is there any work in the house that is assigned to girls? What happens if she cannot do her work?
- ❓ Does her brother have any assigned work? What happens if he cannot do his work?
- ❓ Is there any norm about who eats first and last?
- ❓ Who in the home decides which restrictions to have? Who enforces the restrictions?
- ❓ What happens when restrictions are disobeyed? Can you share some examples?
- ❓ Why do you think these restrictions exist? Are they only on women and girls or on everyone?
- ❓ What is the impact of such restrictions?
- ❓ Do you think such restrictions are fair? (*Not all restrictions may be unfair. Discuss the context around the restrictions.*)
- ❓ What can be done to change unfair restrictions on women and girls?
- ❓ If you were given a chance to plan a programme/event that could address these restrictions, what would that be? How could you make these programme more effective?



 **EXPLAIN:** that some norms about coming home early and not going out in the evenings are related to safety.

 **ASK:**

- ② Why are girls considered more at risk?
- ② If there were more women out at night, would it feel unsafe for women?
- ② If there is a reason for some restrictions, is this discussed adequately and explained to girls? Or are they simply told what to do and what not to do?
- ② Does that add to the ill-feelings around restrictions?

 **SUMMARISE** the following key points:

- Many families have restrictive norms for women and girls. Sometimes the norms are so well accepted by all of us that we do not think of them as restrictions at all. But sometimes we do feel bad when we are stopped from doing what we want to.
- Generally, boys do not face as many restrictions as girls do. The impact often is that girls have a lower self-esteem, lack confidence and begin to accept themselves as lesser human beings. If they are not allowed to play outdoor games, their physical development may also be hampered. Inequality at home is also linked to inequality outside the home, such as fear for a girl's safety.
- Through this programme we are going to challenge such inequalities. For that, we all must be united on these issues, and we must also convince parents and the community.



## 2.3. POWER IN OUR LIVES<sup>4</sup> (45 MINS)

### MATERIALS AND PREPARATION:


- Flipchart papers, markers
- Review the **Annex 1: Types of Power** and ensure that you are comfortable explaining the different types of power.
- Review **Annex 3: Power Situations**. Practice discussing the Types of Power with colleagues to make sure that you are able to discuss power situations clearly.
- Prepare copies of **Annex 2: Illustrations of Types of Power** for each participant.
- Print out each of the four illustrations of Types of Power (from Annex 2) in A4 format – one per page, to use for the facilitator.
- Hang a blank flipchart in the front of the room.
- On separate pieces of A4 paper (or flipcharts cut in half), write the following titles in big bold letters (one per page). Tape each one to a different wall in the room and fold it up or cover it so that participants cannot see the titles:

**POWER WITHIN**

**POWER OVER**

**POWER WITH**

**POWER TO**

 **SAY:** In this session we will spend time exploring the concept of power. Power is something that is always in our lives. It influences our decisions and choices, yet we rarely think about it.

 **ASK:**

- ① In your own mind, try to imagine power. (pause) What does power look like to you? (pause)
- ① What images come into your mind? (pause). What was it that you imagined?

<sup>4</sup> Adapted from Michau, L. et al. *The SASA! Activist Kit for Preventing Violence Against Women and HIV*. Start Phase, Deepening Knowledge Training Module, p 13-14. Kampala: Raising Voices, Dec. 2008]

 **DO:**

- ✔ Encourage participants to act out their images of power if they are comfortable doing so.
- ✔ After several participants have described or acted out their images of power, pass around the **Annex 2: Illustrations of Types of Power** until all have received one.
- ✔ Ask the participants to focus on the first drawing – ‘power within’. Tape that drawing to the flipchart on the wall.


 **ASK:**


- ❓ Did you imagine anything like this when you were thinking about power?
- ❓ How would you describe this type of power?

 **NOTE:** *Guide the discussion in order to link the participants’ reflections of power dynamics and religion.*

 **DO:**

- ✔ After both questions have been discussed, introduce the matching power term ‘Power Within’, and write it on the flipchart next to the image.
- ✔ Repeat these steps for each of the next three images, moving in order from “Power Over,” to “Power With” and ending with “Power To.”
- ✔ Once you have discussed each of the four power images and the corresponding power term, ask all participants to stand in the middle of the room.
- ✔ Uncover the four flipcharts around the room.

 **SAY:** To further explore what these four types of power mean, we will do another exercise. I will read a series of statements. After each statement, move to the flipchart showing the type of power that you feel the statement most describes. Remember to answer honestly and not simply to follow others.

 **NOTE:** *Ensure the directions are clear, asking if anyone has any questions, and then begin. If participants have difficulties moving around the room, consider modifying the exercise – for example, instead participants can raise a sign with the respective power type.*

 **DO:**

- ✓ Read each statement from **Annex 3: Power Situations**.
- ✓ Once participants have moved invite one of the participants standing by each of the power terms (participants may stand at different flipcharts or all at the same one) to share with the group why s/he chose that term.
- ✓ If there is disagreement, discuss and come to a consensus.
- ✓ Bring participants back to their seats and if appropriate to the context give out the **Annex 1: Types of Power**.



**SUMMARISE** the following key points:

- There are different types of power. In this programme, we will focus on: power within oneself, power over someone, power with others and power to act.
- Power can be used positively or negatively.
- Power Within, Power With, and Power To are positive uses of power. Power Over is a negative use of power.
- Power is not in limited supply. One person having power does not mean s/he must take power away from another person. Everyone can have power.

**CONCLUDE** the session by asking the participants to reflect at home about one restrictive norm for girls. Ask them to reflect on whether they would like to reduce the restrictions for girls. Why? If yes, how?

# SESSION 3

## CHILD MARRIAGE IN OUR COMMUNITY<sup>5</sup>

🕒 Time required: 1 hour 35 mins

### 🎯 SESSION AIMS

By the end of the session, participants will:

- Reflect on the risks and benefits of child marriage
- Begin to develop ideas for how to support community members to change their attitudes and beliefs about when a girl is ready for marriage and why girls should take part in decisions that affect their lives.

### 🔍 OVERVIEW

ACTIVITY NAME	TIME ALLOCATED
3.1. The risks and benefits of child marriage	50 min
3.2. Muna's story	45 min

### 📋 RECAP FROM LAST SESSION:

- Welcome the group to the session.
- Request a few volunteers to summarise the previous session and share their reflections from the reflection exercise assigned at the end of the last session.

<sup>5</sup> Adapted from CARE USA. "Facilitator's Manual for Fathers' Groups: CARE's Tipping Point Phase 2, Bangladesh." Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere, Inc., 2019. [https://caretippingpoint.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/FM\\_Fathers\\_Group\\_with-citation.pdf](https://caretippingpoint.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/FM_Fathers_Group_with-citation.pdf) p. 59 and CARE USA. "Facilitator's Manual for Religious Leaders: CARE's Tipping Point Phase 2." Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere, Inc., 2019, [https://caretippingpoint.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/FM\\_Religious\\_Leaders\\_Group\\_14Aug2020.pdf](https://caretippingpoint.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/FM_Religious_Leaders_Group_14Aug2020.pdf), pp. 47-48.

## 3.1 THE RISKS AND BENEFITS OF CHILD MARRIAGE (50 MINS)

### MATERIALS AND PREPARATION:

- Flipchart papers, markers
- Read through the session prior to facilitating.
- Read through **Annex 4: Harmful consequences of child marriage** for more information on risks.
- Make sure to have a clear understanding of the legal framework for child marriage in your country as well as any relevant religious or customary laws, especially considering the following information:
  - What is the legal age of an adult (is there a difference between girls and boys)?
  - What is the age of marriage for girls? Boys?
  - Are there any exceptions to the legal age of marriage?
  - Does the legal age of marriage differ from what is accepted in religious tradition or customary law?

#### DO:

- ✔ Divide the participants into 4 groups.
- ✔ Ask each group to discuss the following for 15 minutes:
  - Group 1:** what are the risks of marriage before 18.
  - Group 2:** what are the risks of marriage after 18.
  - Group 3:** the benefits of marriage before 18.
  - Group 4:** the benefits of marriage after 18.
- ✔ Put up a flip chart and divide it in four sections.

Benefits of marriage before 18

Benefits of marriage after 18

Risks of marriage before 18

Risks of marriage after 18

- ✓ Ask the groups to present what they discussed about benefits and capture the main points in the respective section. Ask the other groups if they wish to add any points to the benefits of child marriage.
- ✓ Then ask the other groups to share what they discussed about risks of Child Marriage. Write up their points on the chart and add the arguments that the other groups add. It is better to have both benefits/risks side by side so that participants can think of the opposites immediately.
- ✓ Draw themes of what the groups have written down as benefits and risks referring to Annex 4: Harmful Consequences of Child Marriage, for more information about risks.

**Example:**

**Benefits of marriage before 18**

- Family may need dowry/bride price or economic benefit of fewer children to care for

**Benefits of marriage after 18**

- Less risky pregnancy
- Child is more likely to be healthy
- Emotionally prepared for marriage
- Can complete education, achieve aspirations
- Girl can contribute more to community and economy

**Risks of marriage before 18**

- Dangerous pregnancy risks
- Not emotionally ready
- More likely to face intimate partner violence
- Likely will end girls' education

**Risks of marriage after 18**

- More dowry/bride price
- May be more difficult to find a husband

**⚠ NOTE:** Make sure that the following questions are discussed while facilitating the discussion on risks and benefits:

- *Are child marriages a reality in your community? Do you know people in your community who had child marriages?*
- *How does it affect the couple? Why?*
- *Do some consequences have a cascade effect and impact other domains of life?*
- *How can we limit the consequences of child marriages while also trying to prevent them at the same time?*



**SUMMARISE** the following key points:



**NOTE:** *Include information about the age for marriage for girls in the country, where you work, and the age of adulthood. If there is a conflict in the legal framework, make sure to highlight it. The global definition of childhood outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is 18.*

- A marriage of a girl or boy less than 18 years of age is considered a child marriage according to international standards.
- Such a marriage can be understood as ‘forced’ since the person is not capable of consenting to marriage as they are still considered a child.
- In some religions and cultures children are considered ‘mature’ or ready for marriage at a younger age, for example, when a girl starts menstruation. However, just because traditionally some cultures have practiced this in the past, does not mean that it is in the best interest of the girl, the boy she will marry, her future children, or the community as a whole.
- As we have seen today, there are many more risks of marrying early than benefits.
- Child marriage can lead to the girl individually – and the couple, facing different problems such as:
  - concerns in their sexual and reproductive health
  - burden of work from young age
  - missed school or be forced to leave school
  - different kinds of gender-based violence
  - need to engage in sexual activity before reaching mature age
  - unwanted pregnancies and motherhood when they are not ready for it
  - chances of high numbers of children
  - become victim of domestic violence
  - depression
  - lack of self-esteem
  - uncertain livelihoods
  - increased responsibilities
  - different social pressures



**ASK:** Considering all these harmful outcomes do you think child marriage should be practiced?



**EXPLAIN:** Sometimes in situations of emergency such as displacement or conflict, families may think that girls are better off getting married early as they will be protected from violence and provided for economically, especially if the family has many children to provide for. Families may also decide that accepting money for dowry/bride price is in the greater interest of the family. However, as we have seen in the session today, there are long-term consequences on girls, families and communities that show this is not the case. It is better for everyone if girls get married when they are ready, after the age of 18. It is time we and our community to take action to convince our people that we must stop child marriages.

## 3.2 MUNA'S STORY

### MATERIALS AND PREPARATION:

- Flipchart papers, markers, index cards (3 different colours), tape.
- Prepare part of the story in advance, making sure to adapt the names and details to the context.


#### Requires CONTEXTUALISATION

-  **DO:** Read the story to the participants.



#### STORY


*Muna is a young girl aged 15. Her parents have lost their jobs due to displacement. They feel they cannot provide for Muna due to their financial situation and have recently arranged a marriage. She would like to postpone marriage and stay in school.*

-  **ASK** participants to finish Muna's story with the group:

-  If Muna was in your community, what would happen to Muna?

-  **DO:**

-  Have participants explain the next steps and actions that Muna and her family would take, including any obstacles she may encounter. Make sure everyone has a chance to contribute to the story.
-  When someone speaks, write each action Muna takes on one colour of index card and place them along a timeline of Muna's life. Write every obstacle on a different colour card.

-  **EXPLAIN:** to the participants to be sure to consider the key social factors which significantly influence CEFM. They should also consider key influential people and community partners who might make a difference in her life.



### **Possible responses could include the following:**

- Muna talks to a friend about her desire to postpone marriage and her friend helps her talk to her parents.
- Muna's mother is pressuring her to get married.
- Muna goes to the religious leader and s/he is understanding and offers to speak to her parents.
- Muna's friend tries to convince her to get married.
- Her parents could consult Muna about her decision OR try to force her to be married.
- Muna's teacher suggests a scholarship.


 **NOTE:** Have some index cards with actions prepared in the event that participants are not forthcoming and engage them by asking questions about potential obstacles and solutions.

### **Possible questions to guide the participants:**

- Where would Muna go to for help? (*friends, teachers, etc.*)
- How the religious leaders would support her?
- What services are available for Muna?
- How would Muna's family (mother, father, etc.) support her? etc.

### **Cards to prepare in advance (contextualisation required):**

- Muna tried to stay in school but it was too expensive.
- Muna speaks to her parents about postponing marriage.
- Her family is upset, they cannot pay for Muna to stay in school.
- Muna enrolls in vocational training and can make income for her family.
- Muna's father beats her.
- Muna's potential mother-in-law becomes involved and shames her.
- Muna's family agrees for her to postpone marriage to remain in school but then she doesn't pass the exam.

 **ASK:** What we, as religious leaders, can do to help Muna in her situation to delay the marriage?

 **DO:** Write the aspects on a third colour of index cards to place on the timeline.

**Possible responses could include the following:**

- Lead community dialogue on CEFM and its consequences.
- Stop facilitating marriage ceremonies in which one individual is underage.
- Speak to the families about benefits of educating daughters.
- Encourage gender-equitable attitudes in your religious ceremonies.
- Identify influential people in the community who can help influence Muna's family.

 **ASK** participants the following questions to guide them to reflect on the exercise:

- ① What happens over the course of Muna's life related to marriage?
- ① What were the factors inside her, in her family and in the community, which enhanced or inhibited the most positive outcomes?
- ① How might we intervene through our work?



**SUMMARISE** the following key points:

- Change involves learning, critical thinking, reflection of risks for changing behaviours (for example to avoid suffering the negative consequences for an action taken), and community validation of new action or behaviour.
- Change often involves moving back and forth, toward and away from personal aspiration of self.
- In our work, we support people and communities that are in different stages of that change process.

**CONCLUDE** the session by asking the participants to start discussing the causes and consequences of child marriages with their family, neighbours and congregation members.

## SESSION 4

# WHAT OUR RELIGION SAYS ABOUT CHILD, EARLY AND FORCED MARRIAGE<sup>6</sup>

🕒 Time required: 2 hours

### 🎯 SESSION AIMS

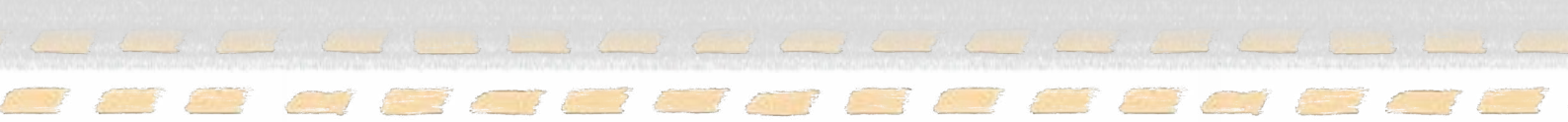
By the end of the session, participants will:

- Review, discuss and refine messages from their religion that promote healthy marriage practices and support caregivers' understanding on the importance of waiting until their children are at least 18 years old to marry.

### 🔍 OVERVIEW


	ACTIVITY NAME	TIME ALLOCATED
4.1.	Introduction to discussion on religious texts related to child, early and forced marriage	15 minutes
4.1 (A) <i>(for Christian religious leaders)</i>	Scriptural and Theological Guides Related to CEFM: A guide for Christian Religious Leaders	1 hour 45 minutes
4.1 (B) <i>(for Muslim religious leaders)</i>	Scriptural and Theological Guides Related to CEFM: A guide for Muslim Religious Leaders	1 hour 45 minutes
4.1 (C) <i>(for other religions)</i>	Workshop to analyse religious texts and traditions in other faiths	1 hour 45 minutes

<sup>6</sup> Adapted from Religions for Peace International, Early Marriage: A Faith Leader Toolkit to Address Harmful Practices in your Community, <https://rfp.org/sites/default/files/publications/Nigeria%20Early%20Marriage%20Faith%20Leader%20Toolkit%20-%20201.28.2013.pdf>, p. 10-21 and Al-Azhar University, Coptic Church of Cairo and UNICEF Egypt, "Peace, Love and Tolerance: Key messages from Islam & Christianity on Protecting Children from Violence and Harmful Practices", September 2016, <https://www.unicef.org/mena/reports/peace-love-tolerance>, p. 13-16.




**⚠ NOTE:** *This session should only be held in contexts where the programme has strong implementing partners from faith-based organisations that have expertise in religious texts. The format of this session is more of a workshop and information sharing and requires strong facilitation from faith-based partners. The session can be facilitated as an interfaith session as long as there are facilitators representing each religious group that is present. If the session is facilitated as an interfaith session, participants should review all religious texts together. Unfortunately, the only religious texts available for reference here are Islam and Christianity. Brief guidance is provided on how to analyse other religious texts locally. More guidance is available in the ENGAGE Implementation Guide on how to facilitate sensitive topics, how to manage group dynamics as well as specific information on working with religious leaders. Please read this guidance thoroughly before facilitating this session.*

## RECAP FROM LAST SESSION:

- Welcome the group to the session.
  - Request a few volunteers to summarise the previous session and share their reflections from the reflection exercise assigned at the end of the last session.
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## 4.1. INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION ON RELIGIOUS TEXTS RELATED TO CEFM

 **NOTE:** *The first part of the workshop is the same for all faith groups. The second part, where we start to explore in more detail, religious texts diverges. For interfaith groups, it is suggested that when examining the religious texts, participants are paired into groups with at least one person representing each faith group present in the workshop so that they can learn and exchange with each other.*

### MATERIALS AND PREPARATION:


- Ensure the facilitator is well-versed in religious texts and is well-respected by the participants.
- Make sure that there is a notetaker for this session as the messages may be refined or added to by the participants and this should be documented for later use.
- To distribute to Christian faith leaders as a handout, review and print out p. 27–34 of this document: ‘The Christian Perspective on Protecting Children from Violence and Harmful Practices’, UNICEF Egypt.
- To distribute to Muslim faith leaders as a handout, review and print out p. 29–35 of this document: ‘The Islamic Perspective on Protecting Children from Violence and Harmful Practices’, UNICEF Egypt.
- Review and print out Christian/Islamic perspectives and key messages to distribute to all the participants as a handout.


 **NOTE:** *Responding to difficult and sensitive topics:*


*The topic of virginity and abstinence before marriage is likely to come up during this discussion. Participants will most likely have strong views and may not be persuaded to change these views. **It will be important to discuss and decide on how to react prior to facilitating this session.** For example, many believe marrying early, often at or before puberty, is the only way to guarantee virginity, and presumably morality, in a bride. However, physical virginity is not the guarantee to morality: “You have heard it said, ‘you shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who has looked at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” (Matthew 5:27-28) According to Matthew 5:27-28, sexual sin, or adultery, includes lustful looks and thoughts. For Muslims, Allah Says: “Do not go near adultery. It is truly a shameful deed and an evil way.” (Quran, 13:32); forbidding His servants to commit Zina (adultery) or to approach it or to do anything that may lead to it (And come not near to unlawful sex. Verily, it is a Fahishah (immoral sin) meaning a major sin; (and an evil way) meaning, a terrible way to behave.*

*A possible response to this could be: This means that marrying a girl early to guarantee that she is a virgin at marriage is not pleasing to God, as it is ignoring the critical need for mental and spiritual purity, which cannot be attained without adult maturity.*


*Some participants might believe the following: Learning self-control is a better/healthy way to ensure virginity until after 18, which is healthy and achievable through spiritual growth and through medical, social, historical and legal education. We must exercise purity of mind and discipline – this is what God wants, not early marriage.*


 **NOTE:** *If you are facilitating the workshop for one faith only (not interfaith), mention only the relevant texts and religions below.*

 **SAY:** This session will be a little different from the previous sessions. Today we are going to explore and discuss what our religion says about child, early and forced marriage. The information we are presenting today is from Al-Azhar University in Cairo and the Coptic Church of Egypt as well as religious leaders from across Africa through an organisation called Religions for Peace. Some of the interpretation of religious texts presented here is based on something called a contextual method<sup>7</sup> of studying religious texts, which seeks to interpret the text in the socio-historical context which it was written, or in other words keeping in mind what life and society was like in the time period in which the text was written. Please remember the group rules that we set for ourselves in Session 1. There may be disagreement in the group about how to interpret certain texts in our religion, but we need to respect each other's opinion. This is a safe space for discussion.

 **EXPLAIN** to the participants the following: Many faith leaders from Islam/Christianity agree that child marriage and forced marriage are cultural practices that have no basis in religion and should be forbidden. Such marriages, which often involve girls, deprive them of their rights to childhood and to consent to the marriage. As we have mentioned in the previous sessions, girls under the age of 18 years do not have the emotional, psychological or spiritual maturity to accept and understand the responsibilities of marriage, including raising a family. Young girls are not ready for the physical and emotional aspects of childbearing and can face lifelong physical complications from early pregnancy. Therefore, parents and guardians are obliged to respect the rights of their children to grow to adulthood before embarking on marriages which might put them at risk or expose them to harm.

 **NOTE:** *Remind participants of the previous session on the risks of child marriage.*

 **NOTE:** *Select Christian Texts (Activity 4.1 (A) or Islamic Texts (Activity 4.1 (B), if you are working with a single faith group, or both texts if you are working with an interfaith group. For other faith groups, select Activity 4.1 (C).*



 **DO:** Ask religious leaders to form pairs and review the relevant messages from scripture – Activity 4.1 (A) and 4.1 (B), depending which religious group.

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<sup>7</sup> Saeed, Abdullah, 'Interpreting the Qur'an: Towards a contemporary approach', NY: 2006, p 3.

 **ASK:**


Questions on the religious texts from the UNICEF Egypt documents<sup>8</sup>:


-  Is this how the religious text is understood and interpreted in your community?
-  If not, do you agree or disagree with this interpretation? Make a note of which you agree and disagree with.

Questions on the Perspectives and Key messages:


-  Is this message already familiar to my congregation/community?
-  Is this message accepted by community members or not? If not, why not?
-  Will this message be useful in my sermons or discussions with community members about preventing child, early and forced marriage?
-  Are there other messages in our religious texts that support ending the practice of child marriage?
-  If the session is interfaith, discuss what lessons can be drawn from other religions and if there are any parallels in your own religion.

 **NOTE:** *More time may be needed to facilitate interfaith sessions.*

 **NOTE:** *The notetaker should be sure to capture any suggested changes or additions to the messages, as they will be used again in Session 7.*

 **DO:** After going through the material and the discussion questions, close the session by asking the group to reflect on how they felt about the session.

 **ASK:** What was the highlight from the day? What was challenging?

 **DO:** Finally, ask the participants to think about how they can use their power to share these messages in their congregations, communities and in their own families. Tell them that in Session 7, we will make a plan and practice using these messages.

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<sup>8</sup> For Christian faith leaders: 'The Christian Perspective on Protecting Children from Violence and Harmful Practices'; for Muslim faith leaders: 'The Islamic Perspective on Protecting Children from Violence and Harmful Practices', UNICEF Egypt.

## 4.1 (A) CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVES ON CEFM<sup>9</sup>

### CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVES ON CEFM

Review and print out p. 27–34 of UNICEF Egypt document: ‘The Christian Perspective on Protecting Children from Violence and Harmful Practices’.

#### What is the Church’s view on child, early and forced marriage?

Christianity does not promote child marriage, forced marriage or the marriage deal (transactional marriage) such as ‘summer’ marriage, because of the nature and sanctity of Christian marriage and the significantly adverse effects such practices have. Therefore, the age of marriage should be after the age of 18 years.

In Christianity, marriage is a holy sacrament, which has a spiritual dimension. The Apostle Paul describes the sanctity of marriage using two important expressions, “*This is a great mystery*” (Ephesians 5: 32) and “*Marriage is honourable among all*” (Hebrews 13: 4). In this way, Christian marriage transcends the flesh to be a coupling of souls, through prayer. Christianity confirms that each party in this sacred relationship should view the other with love and honour. Each should honour the other, in a relationship in which each of them knows their duties and their limits well. The first of these duties and limits is to be giving and to put the other party before oneself. There is no doubt that such a relationship requires a mature person – physically, psychologically, mentally and spiritually – who is capable of realising the nature of the relationship and its essence. “*It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.*” (Genesis 2: 18) “*Let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.*” (1 Corinthians 7: 2-3)

“There is time for everything...a time to love...He has made everything beautiful in its time.” (Ecclesiastes 3:1). God wants us to wait until we are adequately prepared for marriage; the child bride is not prepared physically, mentally, emotionally, or financially for marriage. “Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust on her...” (Proverbs 31: 10-33) The contextual meaning of Proverbs 31 is a mature woman, one who is well-educated, fit enough to undertake family responsibilities comfortably, and knows how to give love and get satisfaction from her husband. These criteria definitely imply that the ideal, “virtuous woman” is not a child bride, but instead a woman who is at least 18, who has finished school, and has attained the physical, emotional, mental, and financial maturity required for a healthy marriage.

<sup>9</sup> Adapted from Religions for Peace International, Early Marriage: A Faith Leader Toolkit to Address Harmful Practices in your Community, <https://rfp.org/sites/default/files/publications/Nigeria%20Early%20Marriage%20Faith%20Leader%20Toolkit%20-%20201.28.2013.pdf>, p. 10-21 and Al-Azhar University, Coptic Church of Cairo and UNICEF Egypt, “Peace, Love and Tolerance: Key messages from Islam & Christianity on Protecting Children from Violence and Harmful Practices”, September 2016, <https://www.unicef.org/mena/reports/peace-love-tolerance>, p. 13-16.



Therefore, it is wrong for marriage to occur between two people who are not capable of shouldering the responsibility of bringing up a new generation. The married couple must be resourceful and aware. This needs maturity and the ability to shoulder life's burdens and to face every event, surprise, change and development that it brings. This means that underage marriage harms not only the husband and the wife, but also their offspring.

These types of marriages cannot produce a successful union. A successful marriage is built on compatibility, acceptance and love. Parents should remember that they must not choose what suits them, but instead what suits their son or daughter, since it is their life, not the life of the parents doing the choosing, that is involved. Marriage needs to be built on a basis of compatibility and consent.

The Church pays a great deal of attention to this matter, even in the pre-marriage stages, through programmes to prepare engaged couples psychologically, morally, culturally and spiritually. At the same time, these programmes explain the importance of choosing a partner for life in terms of compatibility and age, as well as socially, intellectually, culturally, etc. There is a need for more such programmes, especially in the rural areas and the slums, where the phenomenon of child marriage is common. Therefore, it is vital to pay attention to the family counselling programmes, especially those related to the choice of husband or wife, as a way of protecting the family unit and guaranteeing that none of its members is exposed to violence.

 *For use only in contexts where marriage under 18 is prohibited by law:*

### **If child, early and forced marriage is prohibited by law, then why have our communities practiced it for so long without punishment?**

Generations of practice can often make tradition seem like truth. Child, early and forced marriage has continued for so long because people fear the social stigma that has come with remaining unmarried for “too long,” at whatever age the community says that is. These traditions and their attached social stigmas are very strong. Many law enforcement officials fear social stigma themselves and are therefore reluctant to fully punish offenders. Additionally, a lack of money, organisation, and resources on the legal level makes it very hard to enforce laws against child, early and forced marriage. Despite these obstacles, child early and forced marriage is nevertheless still outlawed in [our country], and as 1 Peter 2:13-16, says, “submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human authority, whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent...to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil.” Anti-child marriage laws agree perfectly with God’s will and word in the Bible – therefore, as Christians, we should obey all of these laws.

## KEY MESSAGES FOR CHRISTIAN FAITH LEADERS

### Message 1:

#### Before entering into marriage, one must understand the requirements of marriage.

Successful marriages demand physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and financial maturity. The main purposes of marriage are:

To secure an equal, loving partner for life.

To experience mutual joy and sexual satisfaction.

To safely bear children and create a healthy family.

*“And the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that man should be alone. I will make a helper **comparable** to him.’” (Genesis 2:18) God united Adam and Eve, so that their lives might be more productive and blissful. **Notice that God created Eve “comparable” to Adam – different in build and abilities, but an equal, respected life partner.***

In order for two spouses to be “*comparable partners*,” both must be physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and financially prepared for marriage. This means that both husband and wife must be physically able to fully enjoy marital relations in order to bear healthy children, able to handle household duties, raise children with love and attention, be able to love another person selflessly as God wants us, and have adequate income and means of supporting a family. An underage girl is not yet prepared in any of these ways for marriage and is therefore not the comparable partner required for a God-pleasing marriage.

### Message 2:

#### Marriage is a gift from God and should be treated as such.

- Marriage is a precious, divine gift that demands knowledge and maturity so that we can make the most out of it. Before marriage, we must be mature enough (physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and financially) to know its blessings, challenges, and realities; this includes the willingness to love and sacrifice one’s own well-being for one’s husband or wife.
- As mentioned in Genesis 2:18, God created Eve so that she and Adam each might have a “*comparable*” partner in life. An adult husband and a child bride cannot have this kind of relationship, and therefore cannot treat marriage as a gift from God in their daily lives.
- “*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church.*” (Ephesians 5:25) Christ loved the church, mainly for the benefit of the church. He cared for the church to the extent of sacrificing himself for her well-being. Anyone who marries an unprepared girl with or without her consent, and subjects her to physical/mental suffering, is not God’s ideal model of a husband, and abuses God’s gift of marriage, which is meant to bring together comparable, mature partners in life.

### Message 3:

#### We must uphold the sanctity of marriage by being properly prepared for marriage.

- We must be mentally, emotionally, financially, physically, and spiritually prepared for marriage. We must have knowledge of all that marriage entails, including spousal relations and raising a family. Underage youth do not yet possess this knowledge.
- *“Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust on her...” (Proverbs 31: 10-33)* The description of the virtuous woman tells us that she is mature enough to handle household duties, make her husband happy, and fulfil related responsibilities before God and humanity. In other words, she enjoys family life and is a blessing to the household, meaning she is physically and mentally ready for a family life. Even if her age is not stated, her engagements and achievements reveal that she is at her mature age. The contextual meaning of Proverbs 31 is a mature woman, well-educated, fit enough to undertake family responsibilities comfortably, and with the knowledge to give love and get satisfaction from her husband. Of course, these same virtues apply to the husband.
- Girls are not physically ready to be wives and mothers before the start of menstruation, or even directly after. At the time of menses, a girl’s pelvis is only 85% developed. It will not be fully developed until the age of 18. Thus, pregnant girls under 18 have a much higher risk of obstructed labour and possible death in childbirth.
- Subjecting underage girls to this kind of suffering within marriage does not uphold the sanctity of marriage. Marriage’s sanctity is upheld when both spouses are willing to love and support each other, and are physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and financially prepared to raise God-pleasing families.

### Message 4:

#### Marriage is meant to be a partnership based on mutual love and mutual respect.

- The Bible clearly tells us that both husband and wife must treat each other with love and respect – this can only occur when both spouses are prepared (physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, financially) and willing.
- *“Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence; and likewise, also the wife unto the husband.” (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 7:3)* “Due benevolence” here means two things: kindness and respect, and also sexual love. Those who take a young, unprepared, and especially a forcibly consented bride will find it very difficult to foster an environment of caring, kindness, and respect; the immature, underdeveloped child bride can also not be assured a stress/pain-free and joyful sexual life with her adult husband. Marrying a young girl breeds resentment and fear, not love and respect, as God wants.
- A girl is not physically prepared for childbirth and marital relations, even when she first hits puberty. Medical science has proven that a girl is healthiest if she does not have a child until after age 18. Additionally, no one should marry until they are financially and physically able to support a family, and engage in consensual, loving marital relations.
- We honour the institution of marriage, and preserve its sanctity, by reserving it for those who can enter into a mutually respectful, loving partnership.

### Message 5:

**The proper time for marriage is different for everyone – but successful marriages occur only when both parties are prepared, and preparation is only guaranteed when both spouses are over 18 and finished with school.**

- *“There is time for everything...a time to love...he has made everything beautiful in its time.” (Ecclesiastes 3:1)* This verse tells us that everything has its proper time, including love and marriage. Everything is beautiful when it is done at the right time, and this means waiting for marriage until everyone is mature enough to bear its responsibilities. Nature clearly tells us that girls are not guaranteed to be ready for marriage or children before 18 years of age.
- The right time for marriage is therefore whenever we are physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and financially prepared to be married and support a family – and this is not guaranteed unless both spouses are at least 18, and definitely not when one spouse is a child.

## 4.1 (B) MUSLIM PERSPECTIVES ON CEFM<sup>10</sup>

### MUSLIM PERSPECTIVES ON CEFM

Review and print out p. 29–35 of UNICEF Egypt document: ‘The Islamic Perspective on Protecting Children from Violence and Harmful Practices’.

#### What does Islam say about child, early and forced marriage?

Child marriage has no legitimate basis in the Sharia and forced marriage is clearly invalid and prohibited. Many Hadith and Quranic verses highlight physical, mental, emotional, and financial maturity as essential criteria for marriage. A child bride under 18 is not going to be prepared in any of these ways for marriage – the marriage, therefore, will suffer. It says in the *Quran 30:21*, “...One of His signs is that He created for you spouses from among yourselves so that you may find comfort in them. And He has placed between you compassion and mercy. Surely in this are signs for people who reflect...” Marriage is an institution of love, dedication, and genuine affection founded from a consensual, equal match. An adult man and a child bride are not a consensual, equal match.

The fact of the matter is that early marriage is no more than a custom; it is not part of Sharia or worship. Moreover, the phenomenon is not exclusive to Muslim society but reaches deep into many other cultures. In some regions, mothers and fathers encourage their sons to practice it and may even force their girls into it in order to protect their honour or to reduce the burden of sustaining them.

#### Nutritional Depletion

This orientation towards early marriage has been shown to lead to complications and adverse effects, both immediate and cumulative. Repeated and overlapping pregnancies and nursing periods before the girl’s body is fully developed, and without sufficient periods of rest so that she may recover the nutritional state needed for growth, pregnancy, and breastfeeding, lead to a condition called nutritional depletion.

<sup>10</sup> Adapted from Religions for Peace International, *Early Marriage: A Faith Leader Toolkit to Address Harmful Practices in your Community*, <https://rfp.org/sites/default/files/publications/Nigeria%20Early%20Marriage%20Faith%20Leader%20Toolkit%20-%20201.28.2013.pdf>, p. 10-21 and Al-Azhar University, Coptic Church of Cairo and UNICEF Egypt, “Peace, Love and Tolerance: Key messages from Islam & Christianity on Protecting Children from Violence and Harmful Practices”, September 2016, <https://www.unicef.org/mena/reports/peace-love-tolerance>, p. 13-16.

**HIV:** The risk of infection with HIV during sexual intercourse is higher in females than in males, especially among young girls whose growth is not fully complete but are subjected to sexual relations with husbands who are older than they are and have had previous sexual experiences. This is compounded by the emotional, familial and social problems related to this phenomenon caused by incomplete physical maturity and the emotional immaturity of husband and wife.

Sharia has given parents the right and also the duty to care for their children's physical health and upbringing so that they may emerge from childhood, happy with their lives and their afterlives.

Child marriage is not part of Sharia or worship and it leads without doubt to significant adverse effects. Therefore, the preferred age of marriage is after the age of 18 years. Marriage is a religious and social responsibility that demands the ability and willingness of both husband and wife to bear its responsibilities, so it is not right to apply this burden to children. Young girls may not be entrusted with marriage because they should not be entrusted with more than they can bear. Evidence shows that those who enter early marriage are covered by this general principle of Sharia. God Almighty has said: *"On no soul doth God place a burden greater than it can bear"* (Surat Al-Baqarah 286). The Prophet (pbuh) said: *"There should be neither injury nor return of injury"* (Compiled by ibn Majah in his Sunan, Book of Judgments, 2/784 H 2341 through ibn Abbas.).

Forced marriage usually occurs with young girls. The severe social repercussions and harm to a girl's health caused by child marriage mean the parents bear a great responsibility to avoid such consequences. Allah says, *"And spend in the way of Allah and do not throw [yourselves] with your own hands into destruction. And do good; indeed, Allah loves the doers of good"* (Surat Al-Baqarah (The Cow), 2:195). Conclusion of a marriage contract by force (coercion) without the agreement of the wife is a matter that no rulings of the Sharia approve; therefore, this act is to be ruled invalid. The Messenger of Allah has said, *"A previously married woman should not be married until her consent has been sought, and a virgin should not be married until her permission has been sought"* (Reported by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih, Book of Marriage, Chapter: The father or any other shall not arrange the marriage of the virgin or previously married woman without her consent. 3/358, h5136, on the authority of Abu Huraira).

 **For contexts where child marriage is illegal:**

### **If CEFM is illegal, then why have our communities practiced it for so long without punishment?**

Generations of practice can often make tradition seem like truth. Child, early and forced marriage has continued because people fear the social stigma that has come with remaining unmarried for "too long," whatever the community says that is. These traditions and their attached social stigmas are very strong, and often, local law enforcement feels powerless in the face of community and traditional leaders who permit or encourage the practice. Many law enforcement officials fear social stigma themselves and are therefore reluctant to fully punish offenders. A lack of money, organisation, and resources on the legal level makes it very hard to enforce laws against CEFM.

## KEY MESSAGES FOR MUSLIM FAITH LEADERS

### Message 1:

#### Before entering into marriage, one must understand the requirements of marriage.

- There are several verses that may be interpreted as arguments against waiting for marriage. However, closer examination reveals that Allah above all, wants us to wait until we are prepared for marriage. Successful marriages demand physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and financial maturity. The main purposes of marriage are:
  - To secure an equal, loving partner for life.
  - To experience mutual joy and sexual satisfaction.
  - To safely bear children and create a healthy family.
- Marriage is a means to a spiritual end, not the end itself. *“When a youngster marries early in his youth, Shaitaan (Satan) cries out of desperation and says, ‘Alas! This person has protected one- third of his religion, now he will protect the remaining two thirds also.’”* (Mustadrakul Wasail). Education, self-discipline, and financial independence are absolutely necessary for both spouses, in order to create a happy, healthy marriage and Allah-pleasing family. This verse does not argue for early marriage; in fact, it argues just the opposite. Satan cries out of desperation when we reach a place of physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and financial maturity that makes us less likely to be tempted. Healthy marriages within Islam occur where both spouses are mature, finished with school, and above 18 years of age.
- *“O young men, whoever among you is (financially and physically) able to marry, he should do so, as this helps him lower his gaze and maintain his chastity; and whoever is unable to (marry), he should observe fasting, as this protects him.”* (Hadith of Al-Bukhaari) This sunnah clearly tells us that Islam considers the need for mental, physical, and financial maturity before entering into this highly regarded and honoured institution, as it provides a way for those who are not prepared to love a spouse and support a family to wait until they are prepared. “Lowering our gaze” and “fasting” are not the only things we can do, but they stand for a multitude of ways we can – and must – practice mental and spiritual discipline. Prayer, education, and self-discipline, and not forced/early marriages, are what we should emphasise to maintain chastity and rightness with Allah.
- Marrying simply to satisfy sexual urges/maintain chastity is a sign that we are, in fact, not seeing the whole picture/purpose of marriage as Allah sees it. An adult man who marries an underage girl makes it impossible for both to achieve the spiritual end of marriage that Allah intended.

## Message 2:

### Marriage is a gift from Allah and should be treated as such.

- *“Marriage is my Sunnah, whoever disregards my (sunnah) path is not from among us.”* (Hadith of ibn Majah) Our Prophet (pbuh) endorsed healthy marriages that ensure that both spouses have a reliable partner for life.
- *“Whoever is able to marry, should marry.”* (Hadith of al-Bukhari) The term “able” is important here; it is interpreted as physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and financial preparedness.
- *“...One of His signs is that He created for you spouses from among yourselves so that you may find comfort in them. And He has placed between you compassion and mercy. Surely in this are signs for people who reflect...”* (Quran 30:21) This verse clearly shows how much of a gift the institution of marriage is, but it also shows how both spouses must be able to love and respect one another as comparable partners. Both spouses must be physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and financially prepared for marriage. This means that both husband and wife must be physically able to fully enjoy marital relations in order to bear healthy children, be able to handle household duties, raise children with love and attention, be able to love another person selflessly as God wants us, and have adequate income and means of supporting a family.
- Marriage is one of the greatest gifts from Allah to humanity, and we must respect the institution. One way we can do this is to respect our future spouses enough to know when they are prepared and have adequate knowledge of what marriage involves. Marriage to an unprepared, underage girl does not treat marriage as a gift from Allah.

## Message 3:

### We must uphold the sanctity of marriage by being properly prepared for marriage.

- We must be mentally, emotionally, financially, physically, and spiritually prepared for marriage. Underage youth do not have adequate knowledge of what marriage entails and are not adequately prepared to have joyful marital relations or raise a family.
- Girls are not physically ready to be wives and mothers before menses, or even directly after. By the time of menses, the pelvis is only 85% developed; it will only develop fully by the age of 18.
- Therefore, pregnant girls under 18 face a higher risk of experiencing obstructed labour.
- *“O young men, whoever among you is (financially and physically) able to marry, he should do so, as this helps him lower his gaze and maintain his chastity; and whoever is unable to (marry), he should observe fasting, as this protects him.”* (Hadith of Al-Bukhaari) This sunnah does not just refer to young men. It highlights the need for all of us to be physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and financially mature before we enter into the divine institution of marriage. Remember, if Allah did not want us to be properly prepared to love a spouse and raise a healthy family, He would not have given us a way to avoid temptation. “Lowering our gaze” and “fasting” are obviously not the only things we can do; prayer, education, and self-discipline should be the guiding forces in all of our lives. We must practice all of these things, because they help us not only wait until we are prepared financially and physically, but are also the ways we achieve mental, emotional, and spiritual preparedness for marriage!



#### Message 4:


##### **Marriage is meant to be a partnership based on mutual love and respect.**

- Marriage is an institution of love, dedication, and genuine affection founded from a consensual match between comparable partners.
- Islam emphasises mutual respect in a marriage, between both husband and wife. Imam as- Sadiq states: *“The blessed of women are those who ask for small living expenses, and the evil of them are those who are demanding in terms of living expenses.”* Likewise, the Hadith of Abu Dawud tells us: *“The most perfect in faith amongst believers is he who is best in manners and kindest to his wife.”* These two sunnah, together, show that a good marriage in Islam is one where both husband and wife are mature, kind to others, and respectful of one another.
- Marrying a young girl before she is ready and forcing her into sexual relations is the opposite of kindness; it is doing harm to an innocent, which is a grave sin. Also, a marriage between an adult man and an underage girl is often a non-consensual match between two people who are at very different places physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and financially, which is an arrangement that breeds resentment and fear, not love and respect.
- A good Muslim will not marry a woman without her full consent, or if she is underage; and will treat her with kindness and respect as a partner, so that she can do the same.

#### Message 5:

##### **The proper time for marriage is different for everyone – but successful marriages occur only when both parties are prepared, and preparation is only guaranteed when both spouses are over 18 and finished with school.**

- Before entering marriage, we must understand the requirements for marriage.
- Marriage is not meant to be an institution of financial gain; rather, it is a partnership based on mutual love and respect, between two comparable partners, who can support themselves and their family.
- Both spouses must be physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and financially prepared for marriage. This means that both husband and wife must be physically able to fully enjoy marital relations in order to bear healthy children, be able to handle household duties, raise children with love and attention, be able to love another person selflessly as God wants us, and have adequate income and means of supporting a family. See 2.) *“Marriage is a gift from Allah and should be treated as such.”*



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- **Marrying a girl off for financial gain is against Allah's wishes.** Therefore, as faithful Muslims, we should fight against and avoid marriages underpinned by direct or indirect material benefit. This is the responsibility not only of the girl's parents but also of the boy's parents to avoid and fight against any financial gain from marrying a girl under 18. A true Muslim understands the importance of supporting the poor without taking their young girl in return. Additionally, parents are supposed to pave the way for their daughters to marry at their right age; they are not supposed to impose a high dowry or demand top-of-the-social-ladder husbands for their daughters before they are even ready to marry. See no. 3) *"We must uphold the sanctity of marriage by being properly prepared for marriage"* and 4.) *"Marriage is meant to be a partnership based on love and respect."*
  - It is a fact that adolescent girls are not physically prepared to have healthy pregnancies and births. They are not mentally or emotionally prepared to love a husband, raise children, and handle household duties. They are not financially prepared to support themselves. If we pull them out of school to marry them early, we stunt them spiritually, and in all of these ways – which is the greatest tragedy of all.
  - Prosperity and community growth comes from choice. Give your children the choice of whom to marry and when.

## 4.1 (C) OTHER FAITHS PERSPECTIVES

 **NOTE:** *Shi'a faith leaders may also be included here if relevant.*

### **Questions for reflection and discussion:**

#### **DO:**

-  Brainstorm in the wider group if there are any religious texts or unwritten religious beliefs that support or condemn child, early and forced marriage. These could also be texts or beliefs that address gender equality, the importance of obtaining maturity before marriage, the importance of education, the importance of health and well-being, the importance of childhood.
-  After the group has made a list of relevant texts and/or unwritten beliefs, ask the participants to get into pairs. They should start to discuss each text or belief one-by-one, detail, using the following guiding questions, and take notes.

#### **Guiding questions:**

- Is this text/belief widely accepted in my community?
- Do I agree with this interpretation of the text/belief?
- Is there an alternative way to interpret this text/belief that is not in support of child marriage (for those that support)?
- For interpretations of texts/beliefs that condemn child marriage, can I use these as key messages with my congregation?

# SESSION 5

## HONOUR AND SEXUALITY IN OUR SOCIETY<sup>11</sup>

🕒 Time required: 2 hours

### 🎯 SESSION AIMS

By the end of the session, participants will:

- Gain insight about the concept of honour/reputation and sexuality in their society, and the impact of these practices, especially on adolescent girls.

### 🔍 OVERVIEW

ACTIVITY NAME	TIME ALLOCATED
5.1 Honour/reputation and sexuality in our society	2 hours


### 📝 MATERIALS AND PREPARATION:

- Flipchart papers; markers.

⚠️ **NOTE:** This session will talk about issues which may be embarrassing or sensitive to many participants. Many real-life stories may be recounted. Ask the participants to remember that this is a safe space. Continue maintaining a safe space for expression of individual and collective perspectives around sensitive issues.

Also, the topics discussed in this session could be very controversial in some cultures. You need to be sensitive when handling it. The session is to open the possibility that cultural practices could be questioned when there are negative consequences for children, without “attacking” culture. A “common ground” for any opposing positions could be that culture is precious, and part of who we are. It is important for the facilitator not to use confrontational statements to elicit debate, but could allow such to come from the participants themselves.


<sup>11</sup> Adapted from CARE USA. “Facilitator’s Manual for Religious Leaders: CARE’s Tipping Point Phase 2.” Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere, Inc., 2019, [https://caretippingpoint.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/FM\\_Religious\\_Leaders\\_Group\\_14Aug2020.pdf](https://caretippingpoint.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/FM_Religious_Leaders_Group_14Aug2020.pdf), p. 75-77.



*Remind the participants that the specifics of what will be discussed, e.g., names of persons, events that happened, characters in the stories told, need to be strictly confidential. They should not be revealed outside the group. But the learnings from the discussion can be discussed outside the room. The facilitator needs to help participants enter into deep and respectful conversations about their critical issues and religious norms, so they can take appropriate action for change in their community. The facilitator must keep the focus on the role of influential community members in actively changing damaging social norms and giving rise to the norms, which empower girls.*

*The participants may see that certain social norms and cultural practices are hindering the adoption of new skills, knowledge and practices that are desired for greater child well-being. For example, the discussion may also bring up cases of honour killing or elopement in the families of those present. The atmosphere may become emotionally charged, if this happens. Take a break and play a small game or icebreaker to lighten the atmosphere. Allow individual participants to take a break and then join the discussions after a break.*

## RECAP FROM LAST SESSION:

- Welcome the group to the session.
  - Request a few volunteers to summarise the previous session and share their reflections from the reflection exercise assigned at the end of the last session.
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## 5.1. HONOUR/ REPUTATION AND SEXUALITY IN OUR SOCIETY

### STEP 1 (35 MINUTES)

#### ☑ DO:

- ☑ Divide participants into groups of four with at least 4 to 5 participants in each group.
- ☑ Ask them to discuss the following questions, giving the groups 15 minutes. Discuss for both women and men even if the group is only of men.
- ☑ Two volunteers from each group will make a presentation for 3-4 minutes to the larger group.
- ☑ Capture the main points coming out of the discussion on a flip chart.

⚠ **NOTE:** *The discussion will include clarification of various concepts that emerge.*

#### Questions for discussion:

- In your religion, what does honour/reputation mean for a young girl/woman?
- In your religion, what does honour/reputation mean for a young boy/man?
- Who in the community or family decides on what is honourable behaviour and what is not?
- How would you explain the difference/similarities?
- Why do you think women carry the honour of the family?
- What is the importance of virginity in your culture? In your religion?
- How is a girl's behaviour related to a family's 'honour'?
- Are virginity and honour connected?
- According to your religion, is the importance of virginity and honour the same for boys and girls. Why or why not?
- Is there a mechanism by which the society enforces virginity before marriage?
- How are virginity and honour connected to child marriage?
- Are these moral norms, such as the importance of virginity, the same today as it was a few generations ago?

## STEP 2 (20 MINUTES)

 **NOTE:** *If the group is of mixed sex, make sure that the participants are divided into same sex groups.*


 **DO:**

- ✓ Ask the participants to go back to their groups. Now ask them to tell stories about morals and sexuality to each other of when **they were young versus when their parents were young, and now for their own children.**
- ✓ Ask them to recount from what they have heard and seen or been told about. Give them 20 minutes to discuss the following questions.
- ✓ Give the participants 20 mins for the discussion. Ask the participants to take notes of the stories in the group or be prepared to provide verbal feedback.


### Discussion Questions:

- What happened to a girl that had sex with a boy or boys before marriage? Were there any rumours about her?
- What happened to a girl if she got pregnant before marriage, were there any sanctions?
- In case of sanctions, what were the sanctions?
- Was there any way out of such situations for the girl?
- Is the community perception of such sexual transgressions influenced by religion?
- Ask the participants if the same morals and sexual codes still prevail. What has changed in the interim?
- Ask the participants if the same codes prevail for men? A few generations back and now?
- Is there any connection of these codes on morality and sexuality with child marriage?

## STEP 3 (25 MINUTES)


 **DO:** Ask the participants to come back together and report, based on their group conversations, about the following:

- The situations they discussed.
- What sanctions or ways out were found in the stories shared.

 **NOTE:** *Make visible to the participants that in our culture we have concepts of honour and virginity. Highlight that some or many of them (depending on what comes out of the discussion) still persist. Draw out the linkages between honour, virginity and child marriages. These concepts could also be connected to 'honour killing' or 'elopement by couples' for fear of harassment by the community if these things have happened or are happening in the communities. Draw out the ill-effects of such concepts on the lives of young people, both girls and boys, but especially girls. Ill-effects include:*

- Persistence of child marriages.
- Enforcing marriages within community, within religion, which further entrenches beliefs in honour of a family and honour of a community.
- Policing of young girls' sexuality. This is often done by males in the family, such as fathers or brothers. However, it may also be done by women in the family. For example, calling for marriage proposals as soon as she begins menstruating or looks older; controlling the clothes she wears; stopping her from going to school or playing outdoors; disallowing friendship with boys.
- Sex education is discouraged, fearing that it will lead to early sexual life of young people.
- 'Elopement by couples' for fear of harassment by the community (and honour killing, if appropriate to the context).

#### **STEP 4 (20 MINUTES)**

 **DO:** Continue the discussion in the larger group for 20 minutes.

 **ASK:**

- ① How society, families and young people can move away from the concept of virginity and a narrow and rigid definition of honour?
- ① How religious leaders could help in this process? What part can religious leaders play?

#### **Some constructive responses may include:**

- Recognise that there is more harm to girls and young people due to enforcement of honour, virginity and child marriage as compared to benefits.
- Making our communities safer from sexual harassment and sexual violence is more important than policing virginity and sexuality of girls and young people.
- Educating girls, allowing them to reach their full potential, realise their ambitions and have an independent income is more rewarding for young people, their families and community as a whole.
- As religious leaders, it is critical to discuss the above topics with adolescents, young people and wider community, bringing awareness on the importance of creating violence free environment and stopping harmful practices.





**SUMMARISE** the following key points:

Enforcement of a narrow concept of honour/reputation and virginity can be very damaging for the health and lives of young people, especially girls. Recognising these ill-effects will enable us to move beyond these concepts, focusing on the wellbeing of girls and boys.

**CONCLUDE** the session by asking the participants to observe and reflect how the concepts of honour and virginity are still used in the society. Ask them to develop their own point of view about these based on the discussions. Encourage them to start questioning and challenging family and community members when they talk about restricting girls from mobility or pursuing their dreams, under the pretext of family honour or her risk of losing virginity.

# SESSION 6

## OUR ROLE IN PREVENTING CEFM IN THE COMMUNITY<sup>12</sup>

🕒 Time required: 1 hour 20 mins

### 🎯 SESSION AIMS

By the end of the session, participants will:

- Reflect on their role in influencing positive constructions of masculinity for boys and fathers in their communities in order to prevent CEFM.

### 🔍 OVERVIEW

Activity name	Time allocated
6.1. Circles of influence	80 min

⚠️ **NOTE:** *This session is mainly targeting male religious leaders as positive role models and influencers for men and boys in the community. If female religious leaders have participated in the sessions up to this point, it is recommended that the first activity in this session be facilitated separately in order to create a safe space for reflection. The second activity can be facilitated in a mixed group. While the focus is on men, female religious leaders may play a role in diminishing negative stereotypes or harmful norms within their families and congregations and therefore it is important that they participate.*


### 📄 RECAP FROM LAST SESSION:

- Welcome the group to the session.
- Request a few volunteers to summarise the previous session and share their reflections from the reflection exercise assigned at the end of the last session.

<sup>12</sup> Adapted from CARE USA. "Facilitator's Manual for Religious Leaders: CARE's Tipping Point Phase 2." Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere, Inc., 2019, [https://caringpoint.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/FM\\_Religious\\_Leaders\\_Group\\_14Aug2020.pdf](https://caringpoint.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/FM_Religious_Leaders_Group_14Aug2020.pdf), p. 59-60 and Michau, L. et. Al. SASA! Faith: A Training Manual to prepare everyone involved in SASA! Faith. Kampala: Raising Voices, Dec. 2016, [https://raisingvoices.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/SASA-Faith-Training-Manual\\_Final\\_lowres.pdf](https://raisingvoices.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/SASA-Faith-Training-Manual_Final_lowres.pdf) pp 29-39.


## 6.1 CIRCLES OF INFLUENCE

### MATERIALS AND PREPARATION:

- Flipchart papers, markers, masking tape, chalk, string/rope or something else that you can be used to mark/draw on the floor.
- Make 20 numbered name tags using the **Annex 5: Circles of Influence Name Tags** .  
 **NOTE:** *If there are fewer participants than 20, select the correct number of roles beforehand making sure you have some in each segment (3-9; 10-15; 16-20).*
- Prepare 20 pieces of tape in advance.
- Photocopy and cut out **Annex 6: Character statements**. Fold the character statements in half so no one can read them, and clip or pile each one with the corresponding name tag. Create 20 small piles for participants to choose from, alongside the 20 pieces of tape.

### SAY:

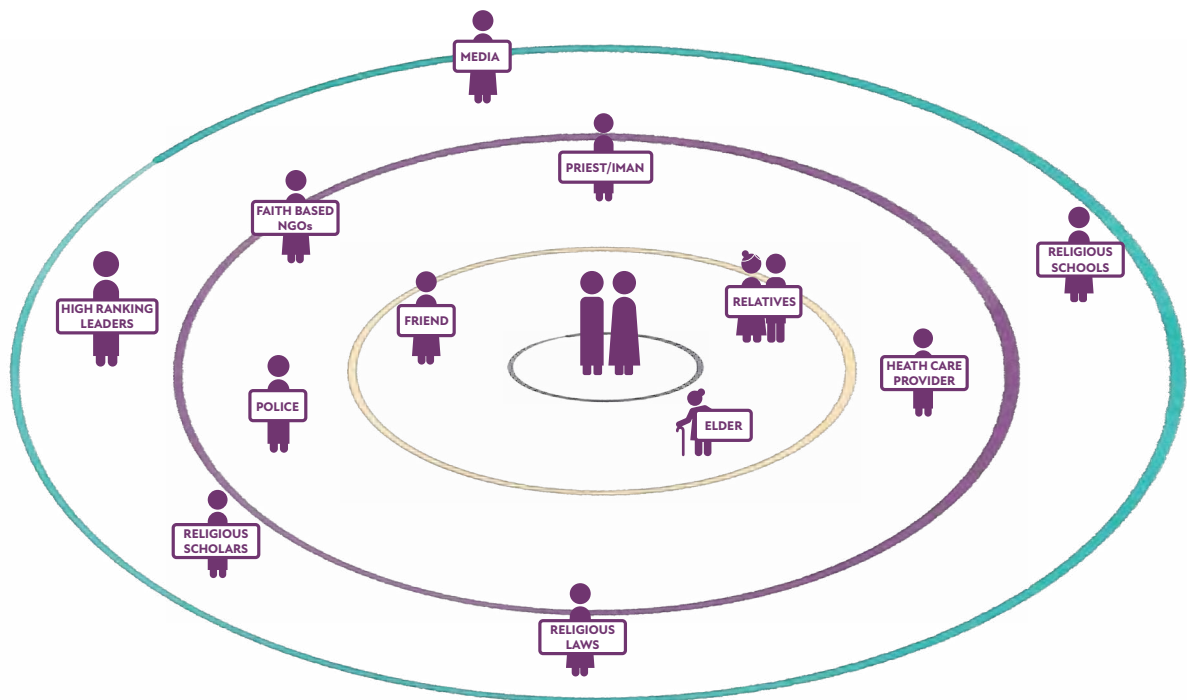
In our society men and boys are expected to act in certain ways. It is important that religious leaders, as influential members of the community, support changing the harmful stereotypes of how men and boys should behave. Similarly, as talking to your own children about these topics, you can also, as religious leaders, encourage fathers to talk with their sons and daughters about sensitive topics. You can encourage husbands to include their wives and children in family decision-making. You can encourage older men to be positive role models to younger boys so that they view women and girls as equal and prefer to marry girls who are ready for marriage, only after age 18. In the next exercise we will explore the influence members of society have on each other and how positive male role models can support communities to change harmful norms.

 **SAY:** As religious leaders we will need to reach out to all the different people and groups in a community in order to effect community change. In the next exercise we will explore how the thoughts, beliefs and actions of others create community norms and how these norms influence change in the community. Norms are unwritten rules in a society that guide how people behave. Norms can and do change over time.

### DO:

- ✓ Mark or draw four concentric circles on the floor as shown in the drawing.
- ✓ Ask the participants to come and take one character statement and to also take a piece of tape. Tell them they can read their pieces of paper, but only to themselves. If some of the participants are not literate, the facilitator can quietly whisper their role to them.

 **NOTE:** *If there are fewer than 20 people, one person can take more than one character as long as they are in the same circle of influence.*



- ✓ Ask the participants who have chosen the characters “young women” and “young man” to stand inside the smallest, innermost circle.
- ✓ Announce to participants: “This young man is named [Ahmed] and this young woman is named [Fatima]. [Ahmed] and [Fatima] please introduce yourselves to the group by each reading the first sentence on your piece of paper.”
- ✓ Once [Ahmed] and [Fatima] have introduced themselves, ask participants:
  - A. “All of you who have numbers 3 to 9, please come stand in this next circle around [Ahmed].”
  - B. “All of you who have numbers 10 to 15, please come stand in this next circle.”
  - C. “All of you who have numbers 16 to 20, please come stand in this outer circle.”
- ✓ Explain the first part of the exercise as follows:
  - A. “I will ask a participant to introduce her/himself and to read her/his first statement aloud, to [Ahmed] and [Fatima]. They are the main characters in this exercise.”
  - B. “This participant will then tap another participant who will do the same, until all participants have had a turn. Only read your first statement.”
- ✓ Ensure there are no questions.
- ✓ Start the exercise by randomly choosing one of the participants to go first. Once everyone has had a turn, conduct a short debrief using the questions below (make sure participants remain in position).

 **ASK:**

- ① Which circle do you think has the most influence on [Ahmed] and [Fatima]? Why?
- ① Are there any circles that do not have any influence on [Ahmed] and [Fatima]? Why or why not?
- ① What does this exercise tell us about community norms?
- ① What does this mean for our work as religious leaders?



**SUMMARISE** the following key points:

- Everyone is influenced by many factors and people, without even realising it.
- People are usually influenced the most by the people who are the nearest to them. They influence us in everyday life.
- Even faith community members who are not as close to us as friends and family influence how we think and act.
- Broader societal influences, like religious customs, religious laws, the media, national laws and international conventions, also affect individuals, even if it isn't as direct or immediate.
- Around all of us there are circles of influence: family and friends, community members and society.
- Explain to participants that they will now continue the exercise as follows:
  - A.** “The participant will read her/his second sentence aloud to [Fatima] and [Ahmed].”
  - B.** “She/he will then go and tap one person on the shoulder and return to her/his place in the circles.”
  - C.** “After the reading, the person who read will tap another person on the shoulder until everyone has had a turn to read their second statement.”
  - D.** “The game will continue like so until everyone, except for [Fatima] and [Ahmed], has read her/his second sentence.”
- When everybody has read her/his second sentence, ask [Fatima] and [Ahmed] to read theirs.

Debrief the game as follows, **ASK:**

- ① What happened when more people were convinced of the benefits of delaying marriage until after age 18?
- ① What happened when men were positive influences in the lives of other men? What influence do men have in the behaviour and attitudes of boys? What role should fathers play in the lives of girls?
- ① How can male religious leaders play a more active role in changing the attitudes and behaviours of men and boys in their communities?



**SUMMARISE** the following key points:

- Norms in the community can change. It is up to all of us.
- Everyone has a role to play, including men. Men are fathers to both girls and boys and can influence their behaviour from an early age until they grow into adults. They can also influence other men in their community. In places where women are traditionally not allowed to make decisions or speak up, it is particularly important for men to start changing their own behaviour and influencing others to change.
- It is up to everyone in the community to create a supportive environment for new behaviours and norms.
- The more people who take on this issue the more likely communities are to succeed in preventing child marriage.

# SESSION 7

## PLANNING CONVERSATIONS WITH OUR CONGREGATION ON CEFM<sup>13</sup>

 Time required: 2 hours


### SESSION AIMS

By the end of the session, participants will:

- Develop and practice applying key messages to use as sermons or conversation starters with congregation members.

### OVERVIEW

ACTIVITY NAME	TIME ALLOCATED
7.1. Planning conversations with our congregation on CEFM	2 hours

 **NOTE:** *This session should only be held in contexts where NCA has strong implementing partners from faith-based organisations that have experience facilitating discussions related to sensitive subject matter with religious leaders.*

### RECAP FROM LAST SESSION:

- Welcome the group to the session.
- Request a few volunteers to summarise the previous session and share their reflections from the reflection exercise assigned at the end of the last session.

<sup>13</sup> Adapted from Michau, L. et. Al. SASA! Faith: A Training Manual to prepare everyone involved in SASA! Faith. Kampala: Raising Voices, Dec. 2016, [https://raisingvoices.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/SASA-Faith-Training-Manual\\_Final\\_Lowres.pdf](https://raisingvoices.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/SASA-Faith-Training-Manual_Final_Lowres.pdf) p. 119-120 and Religions for Peace International, Early Marriage: A Faith Leader Toolkit to Address Harmful Practices in your Community, <https://rfp.org/sites/default/files/publications/Nigeria%20Early%20Marriage%20Faith%20Leader%20Toolkit%20-%201.28.2013.pdf>, p. 23-39.

## 7.1. PLANNING CONVERSATIONS WITH OUR CONGREGATION ON CEFM

### MATERIALS AND PREPARATION:

- Flipchart papers, markers, post-it notes
- Print at least 3 copies of **Annex 7: Action Plan template**.
- Print out **Annex 8: Conversation Starters** to hand out for each of the participants.
- Write the following statement on a flipchart paper: “The benefits of an adolescent girl waiting until she is after 18 to get married.”
- Bring enough blank flipcharts for the groups to make posters, write stories, etc.
- Prepare four different flipcharts with the titles:


**CHANGE IN OURSELVES**


**CHANGE IN OUR RELATIONSHIPS**

**CHANGE IN OUR FAMILIES**


**CHANGE IN OUR COMMUNITIES**


 **DO:** Explain the exercise.

 **SAY:** In this next exercise, you will work in groups. Each group will be given a certain type of community member to engage and a certain topic to engage with them. You will have 25 minutes to work with your group to create an appropriate activity. Think carefully about where you might find them, their characteristics and their interests. Each group will then be given 5 minutes each to engage everyone else in part or all of the activity designed. All the other participants will take on the identity of the specific group you are trying to engage.

-  **DO:** Divide the participants into 5 groups, by asking them to count off one to five and then group themselves by number. Assign each group one of the following types of community members:
- A. Fathers who hang out together at a tea shop
  - B. Group of elders/traditional leaders or other religious leaders
  - C. Women’s group
  - D. Members of your church or mosque during the weekly service/sermon
  - E. Young men



 **SAY:** Through your activity you must address the following topic: ‘The benefits of an adolescent girl waiting until she is after 18 to get married.’ Think about your type of community member, this topic and create an activity that would engage them.

 **DO:** Hang the flipchart on the wall displaying these statement. Assign each group one conversation starter to help them plan their messages. Hand out Annex 8: Conversation Starters, for all the participants to use as they plan their activities.

- **Conversation 1:** What are the religious requirements of marriage in the context of our faith? Does that include marrying a child?
- **Conversation 2:** Marriage is a gift from God/Allah. Are we treating it as such when we marry underage girls?
- **Conversation 3:** How does preparing adequately for marriage help uphold its sanctity?
- **Conversation 4:** How can we make marriage a mutual partnership based on love and respect?
- **Conversation 5:** What is the proper time for marriage?

 **DO:**

- ✓ Ensure there are no questions and begin the exercise.
- ✓ Give 15 minutes for the groups to discuss and then bring everybody back together.
- ✓ Ask one group to volunteer to go first. Before each group starts their activity, they should tell participants:
  - A. What type of community member group participants should pretend to be – based on the type of a group assigned to them (e.g., fathers who hang out together at a tea shop; young men; etc.)
  - B. Where the activity is being conducted (e.g., school, someone’s home, mosque or church, etc)
  - C. When the activity is being conducted (e.g., on a weekday after school, Saturday afternoon, etc.)
- ✓ Make sure the presentations/activities do not exceed 5 minutes.



After each group's presentation, **ASK** the following questions to all participants:

- ② In what way was this activity effective?
- ② In what way was this activity ineffective?
- ② What could have been done differently to strengthen the activity, making it more effective?
- ② Was the time and place, selected for conducting the activity appropriate?



After discussing all presentations, **SUMMARISE**:

When you feel ready, and adequately prepared to speak about child, early and forced marriage, using these talking points/key messages and their scriptural references, you can begin engaging your community in a discussion about these issues. There are several ways you can do this:

- If you make frequent home visits to your community members, use them to help you structure conversations about these topics. These conversations can be as long or as short as you like – you do not need to get to every talking point/key message! Just one per conversation can be enough, since everyone will likely have a lot to say.
- If you lead a men's or women's group, use them as a way to informally get them thinking about the realities of CEFM for their daughters. It is best to begin by engaging a small, trusted group you know will listen and discuss issues with each other respectfully.
- If you feel comfortable enough, you can use these conversation starters to address larger groups of adults or youth in your community.



**DO:**

- ② Explain to the group that we are going to put our plans in writing by using an action plan. We will work together to write activities, plan when to implement them, and put the person in charge of each activity. Divide the participants into three groups and ask them to work together to fill out Annex 7: Action Plan template.
- ② After 20 minutes, ask them to report back 3 key actions they plan to take.
- ② Ask the participants to remember the first meeting when we discussed what changes we expected to see in ourselves, our relationships, our families and our communities/ congregations. Give participants 4 post-it notes and ask them to write one change that occurred during the process of the workshops and stick it to the relevant flipchart on the wall.
- ② Finish the meeting by thanking the group for their participation and wish them the best of luck working together to support their communities and congregations to implement the action plan.



# ANNEXES

# ANNEX 1

## TYPES OF POWER

### FOUR TYPES OF POWER

***Power within*** is the strength that arises from inside ourselves when we recognise the equal ability within all of us to positively influence our own lives and community. By discovering the positive power within ourselves, we are compelled to address the negative uses of power that create injustice in our communities. Our work together will focus first on fostering *power within* ourselves, so that we can begin working to make changes in our communities.

***Power over*** means the power that one person or group uses to control another person or group. This control might come from direct violence or more indirectly, from the community beliefs and practices that position men as superior to women. Using one's power over another is injustice. In this programme, we will aim to increase the knowledge and understanding of both ourselves and community members that *marriage of girls as children* is violence. The community's silence about this injustice hurts everyone.

***Power with*** means the power felt when two or more people come together to do something that they could not do alone. *Power with* includes joining our power with individuals as well as groups to respond to injustice with positive energy and support.

***Power to*** is the belief, energy and actions that individuals and groups use to create change. *Power to* is when individuals proactively and preventatively ensure that all community members enjoy the full spectrum of human rights and are able to achieve their full potential.

The ultimate goal of this programme is to use our power to take action to prevent child, early and forced marriage and to create community norms that promote alternative options for girls, besides marriage.

## ANNEX 2

# ILLUSTRATIONS OF TYPES OF POWER

(FROM SASA!)



**POWER WITHIN**



**POWER OVER**



**POWER WITH**



**POWER TO**

## ANNEX 3

# POWER SITUATIONS

An old rich man promises a young girls' family that he will pay off their debts if they marry their daughter who is age 13.	Power over
Samira feels comfortable to talk to her husband about any problem she has.	Power within
The community passes a bylaw about marriage of children under age 18.	Power to
Reema's mother – Fatima, is very supportive and encourages her to communicate openly even about 'sensitive' topics, like relationships with boys.	Power with
Fawzia tells Meena that she will walk home with her if she feels scared due to the poor security situation in her area.	Power with
Samir forced his daughter Nahla to stay at home in the evenings to care for her younger siblings, while her brother is allowed to go out as he pleases.	Power over
Sara does not feel ready for sex yet, but Khalid convinced her with the threat to look for another girlfriend.	Power over
Karim feels that he can create change and balance power in his relationship with his wife by discussing important family decisions together about money and their children.	Power within
Miriam organises a community event about girls' rights.	Power to
Samira faces many challenges but does not let them spoil her life.	Power within
Anna supports her friend in setting up a centre for adolescent girls who have dropped out of school.	Power with
Sam forces his daughter Nadia to marry an older man because the family needs money even though Nadia and her mother both are not pleased with the arrangement.	Power over
Yasir supports his sister to do the household chores, so she has enough time to complete her homework.	Power with

Omar sees people insulting Musa who is talking about girls' rights at a meeting. He defends Musa.	Power with
Ada is confident that she can finish her studies.	Power within
Asad uses a poster about stopping child marriage to facilitate a discussion about power with men at the mosque/church.	Power to
Kabir organises his neighbours to form a watch group protecting against sexual violence.	Power to
Bashir encourages his friend Farid to talk to his parents, who are arranging his marriage to a younger girl, and tell his family that he is not comfortable to marry such a young girl.	Power with
Ahmed whistles at girls on the street.	Power over
Amira decides that she would like to finish her studies before getting married.	Power to
Ben decides he will not allow for anyone to get married under 18 in the village where he is the village head.	Power to
A community elder pressures a family to marry their daughter at age 12, as she has started menstruating, even though they are worried she is too young.	Power over

## ANNEX 4

# CEFM FACTSHEET: CAUSES, CONSEQUENCES OF CEFM AND BENEFITS OF DELAYING MARRIAGE

### CAUSES OF CHILD, EARLY AND FORCED MARRIAGE (CEFM):

**Culture and tradition:** In many communities CEFM is a tradition, considered to be a part of tradition or culture, or sometimes religion, and one that has continued for generations. Although the practice of CEFM is rooted in tradition and culture, these are man-made practices that can be changed and updated.

**Weak government systems:** CEFM is illegal in many countries around the world. But the law can be altered in many ways and contexts, for example if it includes exceptions, such as through parental consent as legal guardians. Laws are subject to different or unequal interpretations.

**Poverty:** In communities with high levels of poverty, families (at times even the girls themselves) believe that marrying early will be a solution to secure their future. It allows parents to decrease family expenses as they have one less person to feed, clothe and educate.

**Limited education and economic opportunities:** In many countries, educating girls is less of a priority than educating boys. For most families, conflicts and disasters severely restrict their social, economic, and educational opportunities. Some girls and families may see marriage as an opportunity to improve their situation.

**Insecurity and violence:** In countries suffering from war and conflict, girls are at high risk of harassment and physical or sexual assault. In unsafe regions, parents often genuinely believe that marrying their daughters early is in their best interest to protect them from danger. In some countries, CEFM is used as a strategy in war to humiliate the enemy, weaken families and break down communities.

**Lack of awareness** CEFM also is a result of lack of awareness among parents, communities and the children themselves on national laws and on the rights of children and women. Many do not know about international human rights or conventions – or how to make sure their rights are protected.



## HARMFUL CONSEQUENCES OF CEFM<sup>14</sup>:

**Education:** child marriage often means the end of school for girls, denying their opportunity for personal development, preparation for adulthood, and their ability to contribute to the family and community.

**Safety and protection:** girls are subject to violence including marital rape. Girls married before 18 are more likely to report being beaten by their husbands and forced to have sex than girls who marry later.

### Economic wellbeing

*Income and assets:* CEFM limits girls' access to the skills needed to earn income for themselves and contribute to their families and their communities. CEFM often ends a girls' education – one additional year of secondary schooling alone boosts girls' earning potential by 15-25 percent.

### Life

*Death during childbirth:* Complications of pregnancy and childbirth are the main causes of death among adolescent girls ages 15-19 years old in developing countries. Girls under 15 are five times more likely to die in childbirth than women aged 20-24.

*Survival of infants:* When a mother is under 20, her baby is one-and-a-half times more likely to die within its first weeks of life than a baby born to a mother in her 20's.

**Health:** complications arise with married girls often under pressure to become pregnant immediately or soon after marriage, although they are still children themselves and know little about sex or reproduction. A pregnancy too early in life before a girl's body is fully mature is a major risk to the mother and baby. In many cases girls are powerless to refuse sex and are also vulnerable to risk of HIV.

### Social and emotional wellbeing

*Social isolation:* Marriage often causes girls to be socially isolated, bringing unwanted separation from their friends and family. This further limits girls' access to information and key resources.

*Development and empowerment:* CEFM robs girls of their childhood, and the opportunity to develop and realise their vision for their own lives and well-being. Linked to this, child marriage cuts girls off from the support to develop the resources and experiences of their own power within, and isolates girls from other peers.

<sup>14</sup> Adapted from Plan International (2016) Living Free from CEFM. In Girls Champions of Change: Curriculum for Gender Equality and Girls Rights. Woking, UK: Plan International, [https://www.alignplatform.org/sites/default/files/2018-09/9-GCOC\\_LCM\\_Module\\_FA.pdf](https://www.alignplatform.org/sites/default/files/2018-09/9-GCOC_LCM_Module_FA.pdf), p. 14.



## **BENEFITS OF DELAYING MARRIAGE UNTIL AFTER 18:**

**Economic benefits:** Less dowry, cost of treatment, girl can economically contribute if educated and earning income.

**Aspirations fulfilment:** Greater chance of finishing school and achieving personal goals.

**Physical health:** No harm from early pregnancies and potential reduced risk of physical abuse.

**Managerial and leadership capacities developed:** Increased opportunity to develop important life skills.

**Emotional wellbeing:** Feels mentally prepared for both marriage and motherhood, better connections with support networks. Happiness contributes to good health, less disease and less expenditure.

**Contribution to family and society:** Ability to contribute to the wellbeing of the family and society.

## ANNEX 5

# CIRCLES OF INFLUENCE NAME TAGS

⚠ **NOTE:** Change names to fit the context.

Fatima	Ahmed	Ahmed's father
Ahmed's friend	Male/Female Elder	Male relative
Fatima's uncle	Fatima's friend	Neighbour
Adolescent boy	Male/Female Religious Leader	Health care provider
Member of congregation (church/mosque)	Women's prayer group leader	Men's prayer group leader
Local leader	Male/female teacher	Social welfare officer
Judge	Police officer	

# ANNEX 6

## CIRCLES OF INFLUENCE

### CHARACTER STATEMENTS

#### Character 1: Fatima

- Statement 1** My name is Fatima, I am 16 years old. My family wants me to marry Ahmed, he is 24 years old. I don't want to get married yet, but my father makes all of the decisions in our house, he never listens to me or my mother.
- Statement 2** My name is Fatima. My father listens to me and respects my choices. We talk about our problems and solve them together.

#### Character 2: Ahmed

- Statement 1** My name is Ahmed, I am 24 years old. I am supposed to marry Fatima. My father married my mother when she was only 12 and he beats her when she makes him angry. I guess this is what happens in marriage.
- Statement 2** My name is Ahmed. I want to marry a girl my own age, when she is mature enough emotionally and physically for the challenges of marriage. I want to be a different kind of father and husband than my father was.

#### Character 3: Ahmed's father

- Statement 1** I am your father. We were raised knowing that men should make all the family decisions and can discipline their wives if they disobey. This is how things should be, our religion is clear, that a woman must submit to her husband.
- Statement 2** I am your father. I taught you to respect women through my actions. I help your mother with household work and take care of your brothers and sisters. It was important to me that my male and female children are treated the same in life. You both can go out and see your friends and finish your education, you can both choose when and who you marry.

#### Character 4: Ahmed's friend

- Statement 1** I am a friend of Ahmed. We go to the tea shop together and harass young girls who walk by at night – they should stay indoors if they are from a good family. But it is normal for men.
- Statement 2** I am a friend of Ahmed. When we are out at the tea shop, we discuss our goals in life. I support Ahmed who wants to marry a woman around his age who is ready for marriage and who he can discuss and share things with. Our religion is clear that marriage should be based on mutual respect and love between a husband and wife.

### Character 5: Male elder

**Statement 1** I am a male elder. You respect me and follow my advice. Men have to make all the decisions for a family and should think about money above all else.

**Statement 2** I am a male elder. I advise you to make decisions together as a family and to think of the long-term benefits of delaying the age of marriage for your children, even if you think it might help with your financial problems in the short-term.

### Character 6: Male relative

**Statement 1** I am your male relative. I ensure you respect the family customs. Girls in this family do not have freedom to hang out outside the house with boys, they must protect the family honour. Neighbours will talk if they are seen with a boy.

**Statement 2** I am your male relative. In my house, we treat girls and boys equally. Why don't you do the same to make your family peaceful and happy?

### Character 7: Fatima's uncle

**Statement 1** I am Fatima's uncle. You are part of our family where women stay quiet and don't complain. This is part of our religion.

**Statement 2** I am Fatima's uncle. In this family, women and men have equal rights and can talk freely to each other.

### Character 8: Fatima's friend

**Statement 1** I am a friend of Fatima. You and I discuss everything together. My family is similar to yours—men are head of the house, we have to endure and keep silent.

**Statement 2** I am a friend of Fatima. Adolescents should be able to talk to their parents and take part in decisions that affect their lives. I support Fatima to tell her parents she is not ready for marriage.

### Character 9: Neighbour

**Statement 1** I am your neighbour. I see your daughter going out at night with her friends. I gossip about this with the other neighbours.

**Statement 2** I am your neighbour. I respect the rights of girls and believe that they should have equal opportunities as boys to finish their studies and socialise with their friends.

### Character 10: Adolescent boy

**Statement 1** I am an adolescent boy. I keep silent when I see other boys teasing girls—what can I do?

**Statement 2** I am an adolescent. I helped the teacher organise an event for students about equality between girls and boys.

### Character 11: Male/female Religious Leader

**Statement 1** I am a priest/Imam. I keep silent. God/Allah will take care of things.

**Statement 2** I am a priest/imam. I do premarital counselling with all couples about nonviolence and respect. I regularly give sermons about the importance of fathers waiting for the right time for their children to get married; they must be mentally and physically ready and have the right to make their own decisions.

### Character 12: Health care provider

**Statement 1** I am a health care provider. I know that some girls experience sexual violence in this community and are forced to get married to protect the family honour, but I don't say anything.

**Statement 2** I am a health care provider. We talk to parents about the importance of talking to their adolescent girls and boys to make sure they understand about reproductive health.

### Character 13: Member of congregation (church/mosque)

**Statement 1** I am a member of your church/mosque. I know that your family is negotiating a marriage for Fatima with an older man, but it is none of my business.

**Statement 2** I am a member of your church/mosque. After service, I talk to the members of my church/mosque about the benefits of waiting for adolescent girls to finish their education before getting married.

### Character 14: Women's prayer group leader

**Statement 1** I lead a women's prayer group at the mosque/church. Boys will be boys, it is not our role to try to change how they act in this culture.

**Statement 2** I lead a women's prayer group at the mosque/church. We try to teach about parenting and talk to our male children to teach them about gender equality and respectful relationships.

### Character 15: Men's prayer group leader

**Statement 1** I lead a men's prayer group at the mosque/church. We talk a lot about how families who let girls socialise outside of the house are asking for problems.

**Statement 2** I lead a men's prayer group at the mosque/church. We discuss in our group how we can support other fathers like us to be positive role models for their sons and to treat their daughters and sons equally.

### Character 16: Local leader

**Statement 1** I am a local leader. When families decide to marry their children is none of my business.

**Statement 2** I am a local leader. Child marriage is not good for girls or boys! We have a bylaw against it!

### Character 17: Male/female teacher

**Statement 1** I am a male teacher. Making jokes about girls is just for fun, it doesn't do any harm.

**Statement 2** I am a male teacher. I role model to my students that girls and boys are equally valuable, and that harassment is not okay.

### Character 18: Social welfare officer

**Statement 1** I am a social welfare officer. When girls are raped in my village the families usually do mediation and the girl marries the boy or man who raped her. This is the way we do things normally.

**Statement 2** I am a social welfare officer. I deal with both violence against children and women. I try to advocate against mediation as a solution to violence, I know it does not work.

### Character 19: Judge

**Statement 1** I am a judge. Sometimes families will come to me to marry girls who are 12 years old. I say nothing, it is not my business even when I know they have falsified the age on the birth certificate.

**Statement 2** I am a judge. When a family comes to me to marry a girl who is underage, I explain to them the benefits of waiting until she is ready for marriage and why adolescents must be able to decide for themselves when they get married.

### Character 20: Police officer

**Statement 1** I am a police officer. There are reports of sexual violence against girls in this community, but it is not something I can prevent.

**Statement 2** I am a police officer. I take all cases of violence in the community seriously and have set up a watch group to make sure the community is safe, including at night.

# ANNEX 7

## ACTION PLAN TEMPLATE

### ACTION PLAN TEMPLATE

What is your goal?

What are the key steps we need to take to get there?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

How will we take on the steps?

	Type of activity (one on one discussion, event, meeting, etc.)	Timeframe (when/how often)	Target group (adolescent boys, fathers, etc.)	Location (area, venue)	Key message	Resources required	Person(s) in charge
<b>1</b>							
<b>2</b>							
<b>3</b>							
<b>4</b>							
<b>5</b>							



# ANNEX 8

## CONVERSATION STARTERS

### CONVERSATION STARTER HANDOUT: CHRISTIAN

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#### Conversation 1:

What are the religious requirements of marriage in the context of our faith? Does that include marrying a child?

#### Key points:

**Before entering into marriage, one must understand the requirements of marriage.**

- Successful marriages demand physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and financial maturity. The main purposes of marriage are:
  1. To secure an equal, loving partner for life.
  2. To experience mutual joy and sexual satisfaction.
  3. To safely bear children and create a healthy family.
- “And the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that man should be alone. I will make a helper comparable to him.’” (Genesis 2:18) God united Adam and Eve, so that their lives might be more productive and blissful. Notice that God created Eve “comparable” to Adam – different in build and abilities, but an equal, respected life partner.
- In order for two spouses to be “comparable partners,” both must be physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and financially prepared for marriage. This means that both husband and wife must be physically able to fully enjoy marital relations in order to bear healthy children, be able to handle household duties, raise children with love and attention, be able to love another person selflessly, as God wants us, and have adequate income and means of supporting a family. An underage girl is not yet prepared in any of these ways for marriage and is therefore not the comparable partner required for a God-pleasing marriage.

#### Key Facts

- Girls who are married under the age of 18 are often forced to drop out of school, discontinuing their education and seriously limiting their future.
- Children and youth under 18, especially those who have left school, are often not ready to shoulder the responsibilities of a spouse and family.
- Girls who are married under the age of 18, can develop fistula (incontinence of urine or faeces) and other problems that lead to infertility, due to early, forced sexual relations.
- Girls who are married under the age of 18, and subsequently become very young mothers, are at a much higher risk of maternal death, and their babies are more likely to die as well.

### **Quick Tips:**

- Look for opportunities to begin talking to your community about issues of **health and wellness, as well as marriage**. It is important that people walk away with a sense of personal and communal responsibility for the health and well-being of their community's girls and women.
- Address the **Key Facts** referred to above. If people have misconceptions about CEFM, it's important to correct those.

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### **Conversation 2:**

#### **Marriage is a gift from God. Are we treating it as such when we marry underage girls?**

### **Key points:**

#### **Marriage is a gift from God and should be treated as such.**

- Marriage is a precious, divine gift that demands knowledge and maturity so that we can make the most out of it. Before marriage, we must be mature enough (physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually and financially) to know its blessings, challenges, and realities; this includes the willingness to love and sacrifice one's own well-being for one's husband or wife.
- As mentioned in Genesis 2:18, God created Eve so that she and Adam each might have a "comparable" partner in life. An adult husband and a child bride cannot have this kind of relationship, and therefore cannot treat marriage as a gift from God in their daily lives.
- "*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church.*" (Ephesians 5:25) Christ loved the church, mainly for the benefit of the church. He cared for the church to the extent of sacrificing himself for her well-being. Anyone who marries an unprepared girl with or without her consent, and subjects her to physical and/or mental suffering, is not God's ideal model of a husband, and abuses God's gift of marriage – which is meant to bring together comparable, mature partners in life.

### **Key Facts:**

- Girls who are married under the age of 18 are often forced to drop out of school, discontinuing their education and seriously limiting their future.
- Children and youth under 18, especially those who have left school, are often not ready to shoulder the responsibilities of a spouse and family.
- Girls who are married under the age of 18 can develop fistula and other problems that lead to infertility, due to early, forced sexual relations.
- Girls who are married under the age of 18, and subsequently become very young mothers, are at a much higher risk of maternal death, and their babies are more likely to die as well.

### **Quick Tips:**

- Stress the fact that all people can play a role in reducing your community's practice of child marriage, and thus play a key role in promoting the health and well-being of girls and women. Whether it is telling people about the harmfulness of child marriage, supporting family members who decide NOT to marry their daughters early, or choosing not to allow our daughters to marry until they are 18, there are many things that we can each do to help create a healthy community.
- Make sure that during this conversation your community begins to really understand the basic facts about child marriage, as these will be built upon in subsequent conversations.

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### **Conversation 3:**

#### **How does preparing adequately for marriage help uphold its sanctity?**

### **Key points:**

#### **We must uphold the sanctity of marriage by being properly prepared for marriage.**

- We must be mentally, emotionally, financially, physically, and spiritually prepared for marriage. We must have knowledge of all that marriage entails, including spousal relations and raising a family. Underage children do not yet possess this knowledge.
- *“Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust on her...” (Proverbs 31: 10-33)* The description of the virtuous woman tells us that she is mature enough to handle household duties, make her husband happy, and fulfil related responsibilities before God and humanity. In other words, she enjoys family life and is a blessing to the household, meaning she is physically and mentally ready for a family life. Even if her age is not stated, her engagements and achievements reveal that she is of a mature age. The contextual meaning of Proverbs 31 is a mature woman, well-educated, fit enough to undertake family responsibilities comfortably, and with the ability to give love and get satisfaction from her husband. Of course, these same virtues apply to the husband.
- Girls are not physically ready to be wives and mothers before the start of menstruation, or even directly after. At the time of menses, a girl's pelvis is only 85% developed. It will not be fully developed until the age of 18. Thus, pregnant girls under 18 have a much higher risk of obstructed labour and possible death in childbirth.
- Subjecting underage girls to this kind of suffering within marriage does not uphold the sanctity of marriage. Marriage's sanctity is upheld when both spouses are willing to love and support each other, and are physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and financially prepared to raise God-pleasing families.

### **Key facts:**

- Girls who are married under the age of 18 are often forced to drop out of school, discontinuing their education and seriously limiting their future.
- Children and youth under 18, especially those who have left school, are often not ready to shoulder the responsibilities of a spouse and family.
- Girls who are married under the age of 18 can develop fistula and other problems that lead to infertility, due to early, forced sexual relations.
- Girls who are married under the age of 18, and subsequently become very young mothers, are at a much higher risk of maternal death, and their babies are more likely to die as well.

### **Quick Tips:**

- Know that child marriage has never been shown to have ANY beneficial effects whatsoever; on the contrary, all studies on the subject show how much child marriage hurts girls and women.
- Make the conversation easier by talking about what a healthy marriage and a healthy family looks like and how one way to support one another is making sure that everyone in the family stays healthy. Ensuring both spouses are prepared for marriage is one way to do that.

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## **Conversation 4: How can we make marriage a mutual partnership based on love and respect?**

### **Key points:**

#### **Marriage is meant to be a partnership based on mutual love and respect.**

- The Bible clearly tells us that both husband and wife must treat each other with love and respect – this can only occur when both spouses are prepared (physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, financially) and willing.
- *“Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence; and likewise, also the wife unto the husband.” (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 7:3)* “Due benevolence” here means two things: kindness and respect, and also sexual love. Those who take a young, unprepared, and especially a forcibly consented bride, will find it very difficult to foster an environment of caring, kindness and respect. The immature, underdeveloped child bride can also not be assured a stress/pain free and joyful sexual life with her adult husband. Marrying a young girl breeds resentment and fear, not love and respect, as God wants.
- A girl is not physically prepared for childbirth and marital relations, even when she first hits puberty. Medical science has proven that a girl is healthiest if she does not have a child until after age 18. Additionally, no one should marry until they are financially and physically able to support a family, and engage in consensual, loving marital relations.
- We honour the institution of marriage, and preserve its sanctity, by reserving it for those who can enter into a mutually respectful, loving partnership.

### **Key Facts**

- Girls who are married under the age of 18, are often forced to drop out of school, discontinuing their education and seriously limiting their future.
- Children and youth under 18, especially those who have left school, are often not ready to shoulder the responsibilities of a spouse and family.
- Girls who are married under the age of 18, can develop fistula and other problems that lead to infertility, due to early, forced sexual relations.
- Girls who are married under the age of 18, and subsequently become very young mothers, are at a much higher risk of maternal death, and their babies are more likely to die as well.

### **Quick Tips**

- Recognise that our decisions do not just affect us – they affect our families, loved ones, and all those around us.
- Help your community to understand that this means: child marriage does not just affect us. If a daughter or mother dies in childbirth, because she is too young to be married and bearing children or is shunned because she has developed fistula from traumatic childbirths or forced sexual relations, they are less able to work and support our families. We have a responsibility to protect ourselves and those around us.

Above all, emphasise this: **the practice of child marriage does not just hurt one girl; it hurts the entire community, and robs it of its dignity.**

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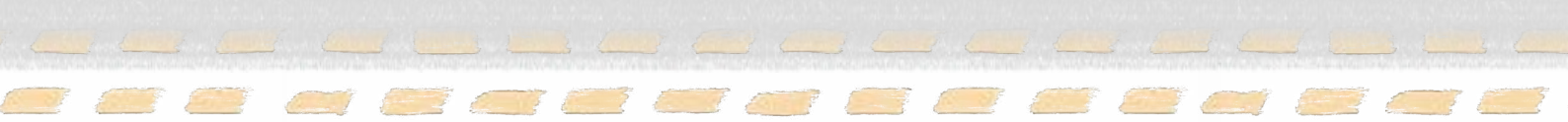
### **Conversation 5:**

#### **What is the proper time for marriage?**

#### **Key points:**

**The proper time for marriage is different for everyone – but successful marriages occur only when both parties are prepared, and preparation is only guaranteed when both spouses are over 18 and finished with school.**

- The right time for marriage is therefore whenever we are physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually and financially prepared to be married and support a family – and this is not guaranteed unless both spouses are at least 18, and definitely not when one spouse is a child.



**Key facts:**

- Girls who are married under the age of 18 are often forced to drop out of school, discontinuing their education and seriously limiting their future.
- Children and youth under 18, especially those who have left school, are often not ready to shoulder the responsibilities of a spouse and family.
- Girls who are married under the age of 18 can develop fistula and other problems that lead to infertility, due to early, forced sexual relations.
- Girls who are married under the age of 18, and subsequently become very young mothers, are at a much higher risk of maternal death, and their babies are more likely to die as well.

**Quick Tips:**

- Be sure that your congregants understand that marriage is a path to spiritual peace and righteousness for both spouses. Marrying a young girl, when she is not fully prepared to be a wife and mother, has the opposite effect, and does not breed mutual love or spiritual growth.
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## CONVERSATION STARTER HANDOUT: MUSLIM

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### Conversation 1:

What are the religious requirements of marriage in the context of our faith?  
Does that include marrying a child?

#### Key points:

#### **Before entering into marriage, one must understand the requirements of marriage**

- Allah above all, wants us to wait until we are prepared for marriage. Successful marriages demand physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and financial maturity. The main purposes of marriage are:
  1. To secure an equal, loving partner for life.
  2. To experience mutual joy and sexual satisfaction.
  3. To safely bear children and create a healthy family.
- Marriage is a means to a spiritual end, not the end itself. “When a youngster marries early in his youth, *Shaitaan* (Satan) cries out of desperation and says, ‘Alas! This person has protected one-third of his religion, now he will protect the remaining two thirds also.’” (Mustadrakul Wasail) Education, self-discipline, and financial independence are absolutely necessary for both spouses, in order to create a happy, healthy marriage and Allah-pleasing family. This verse does not argue in favour of CEFM– in fact, it argues just the opposite. Satan cries out of desperation, when we reach a place of physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and financial maturity that makes us less likely be tempted. Healthy marriages within Islam occur where both spouses are mature, finished with school, and above 18 years of age.
- “O young men, whoever among you is (financially and physically) able to marry, he should do so, as this helps him lower his gaze and maintain his chastity; and whoever is unable to (marry), he should observe fasting, as this protects him.” (Hadith of Al-Bukhaari) This sunnah clearly tells us that Islam considers the need for mental, physical, and financial maturity before entering into this highly regarded and honoured institution, as it provides a way for those who are not prepared to love a spouse and support a family to wait until they are prepared. “Lowering our gaze” and “fasting” are not the only things we can do, but they stand for a multitude of ways we can – and must – practice mental and spiritual discipline. Prayer, education, and self-discipline, and not early marriages of girls under 18, are what we should emphasise to maintain chastity and rightness with Allah.
- “O people, Jibrael has brought unto me a divine command stating that girls are like fruits from a tree. If they are not plucked in time then they get rotten by the rays of the sun and a slight blow of the wind will result in their falling down from the tree” (as narrated by Imam as-Sadiq). As the Prophet’s teachings do not contradict one another, this sunnah should be interpreted in light of the previous sunnah, which provides ways for us to wait and keep ourselves from temptation. This verse does not warn against waiting the proper amount of time; rather, it warns against delaying marriage when we have become, in fact, fully capable of entering into marriage and mature enough to do so.

- Marrying simply to satisfy sexual urges or maintain chastity is a sign that we are, in fact, not seeing the whole picture or purpose of marriage as Allah sees it. An adult man who marries an underage girl makes it impossible for both to achieve the spiritual end of marriage that Allah intended.

### **Key Facts**

- Girls who are married under the age of 18 are often forced to drop out of school, discontinuing their education and seriously limiting their future.
- Children and youth under 18, especially those who have left school, are often not ready to shoulder the responsibilities of a spouse and family.
- Girls who are married under the age of 18 can develop fistula (incontinence of urine or faeces) and other problems that lead to infertility, due to early, forced sexual relations.
- Girls who are married under the age of 18, and subsequently become very young mothers, are at a much higher risk of maternal death, and their babies are more likely to die as well.

### **Quick Tips:**

- Look for opportunities to begin talking to your community about issues of **health and wellness, as well as marriage**. We want to make sure that people walk away with a sense of personal and communal responsibility for the health and well-being of their community's girls and women.
- Address the **Key Facts** referred to above. If people have misconceptions about child marriage, it's important to correct those.

---

### **Conversation 2:**

**Marriage is a gift from Allah. Are we treating it as such when we marry underage girls?**

### **Key points:**

#### **Marriage is a gift from Allah and should be treated as such.**

- *“Marriage is my Sunnah, whoever disregards my (sunnah) path is not from among us.”* (Hadith of *ibn Majah*) Our Prophet (pbuh) endorsed healthy marriages that ensure that both spouses have a reliable partner for life.
- *“Whoever is able to marry, should marry.”* (Hadith of *al-Bukhari*) The term “able” is important here; it is interpreted as physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and financial preparedness.
- *“...One of His signs is that He created for you spouses from among yourselves so that you may find comfort in them. And He has placed between you compassion and mercy. Surely in this are signs for people who reflect...”* (Quran 30:21) This verse clearly shows how much of a gift the institution of marriage is, but it also shows how both spouses must be able to love and respect one another as comparable partners. Both spouses must be physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and financially prepared for marriage. This means that both husband and wife must be physically able to fully enjoy marital relations in order bear healthy children, able to handle household duties, raise



children with love and attention, be able to love another person selflessly, as God wants us, and have adequate income and means of supporting a family.

- Marriage is one of the greatest gifts from Allah to humanity, and we must respect the institution. One way we can do this is to respect our future spouses enough to know when they are prepared and have adequate knowledge of what marriage involves. Marriage to an unprepared, underage girl does not treat marriage as a gift from Allah.

### **Key Facts:**

- Girls who are married under the age of 18, are often forced to drop out of school, discontinuing their education and seriously limiting their future.
- Children and youth under 18, especially those who have left school, are often not ready to shoulder the responsibilities of a spouse and family.
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### **Quick Tips:**

- Stress the fact that all people can play a role in reducing your community's practice of child marriage, and thus play a key role in promoting the health and well-being of girls and women. Whether it is telling people about the harmfulness of child marriage, supporting family members who decide NOT to marry their daughters early, or choosing not to allow our daughters to marry until they are 18, there are many things that we can each do to help create a healthy community.
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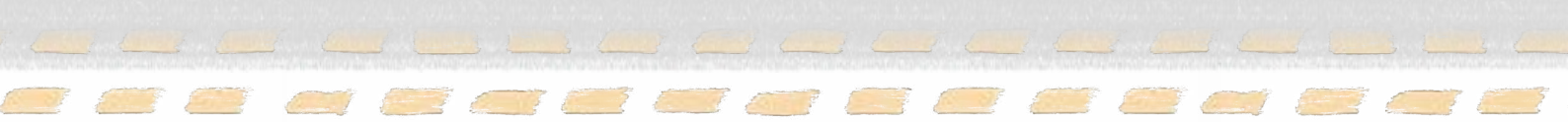
### **Conversation 3:**

#### **How does preparing adequately for marriage help uphold its sanctity?**

### **Key points:**

#### **We must uphold the sanctity of marriage by being properly prepared for marriage.**

- We must be mentally, emotionally, financially, physically and spiritually prepared for marriage. Underage youth do not have adequate knowledge of what marriage entails and are not adequately prepared to have joyful marital relations or raise a family.
- Girls are not physically ready to be wives and mothers before menses, or even directly after. By the time of menses, the pelvis is only 85% developed; it will only develop fully by the age of 18. Therefore, pregnant girls under 18 face a higher risk of experiencing obstructed labour.

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- “O young men, whoever among you is (financially and physically) able to marry, he should do so, as this helps him lower his gaze and maintain his chastity; and whoever is unable to (marry), he should observe fasting, as this protects him.” (Hadith of Al-Bukhaari) This sunnah does not just refer to young men; it highlights the need for all of us to be physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and financially mature before we enter into the divine institution of marriage. Remember, if Allah did not want us to be properly prepared to love a spouse and raise a healthy family, He would not have given us a way to avoid temptation. “Lowering our gaze” and “fasting” are obviously not the only things we can do; prayer, education and self-discipline should be the guiding forces in all of our lives. We must practice all of these things, because they help us not only wait until we are prepared financially and physically, but are also the ways we achieve mental, emotional and spiritual preparedness for marriage!

**Key facts:**

- Girls who are married under the age of 18, are often forced to drop out of school, discontinuing their education and seriously limiting their future.
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### **Conversation 4:**

#### **How can we make marriage a mutual partnership based on love and respect?**

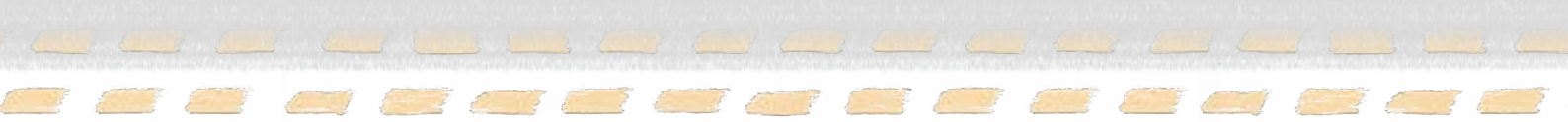
### **Key points:**

#### **Marriage is meant to be a partnership based on mutual love and respect.**

- Marriage is an institution of love, dedication and genuine affection founded from a consensual match between comparable partners.
- Islam emphasises mutual respect in a marriage, between both husband and wife. Imam as-Sadiq states: “The blessed of women are those who ask for small living expenses, and the evil of them are those who are demanding in terms of living expenses.” Likewise, the Hadith of Abu Dawud tells us: “The most perfect in faith amongst believers is he, who is best in manners and kindest to his wife.” These two sunnah, together, show that a good marriage in Islam is one where both husband and wife are mature, kind to others and respectful of one another.
- Marrying a young girl before she is ready and forcing her into sexual relations is the opposite of kindness; it is doing harm to an innocent, which is a grave sin. Also, a marriage between an adult man and an underage girl is often a non-consensual match between two people who are at very different places physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually and financially, which is an arrangement that breeds resentment and fear, not love and respect.
- A good Muslim will not marry a woman without her full consent, or if she is underage, and will treat her with kindness and respect as a partner, so that she can do the same!

### **Key Facts**

- Girls who are married under the age of 18, are often forced to drop out of school, discontinuing their education and seriously limiting their future.
- Children and youth under 18, especially those who have left school, are often not ready to shoulder the responsibilities of a spouse and family.

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- Girls who are married under the age of 18, can develop fistula and other problems that lead to infertility, due to early, forced sexual relations.
  - Girls who are married under the age of 18, and subsequently become very young mothers, are at a much higher risk of maternal death, and their babies are more likely to die as well.

### Quick Tips

- Recognise that our decisions do not just affect us – they affect our families, loved ones and all those around us.
- Help your community to understand that this means: child marriage does not just affect us. If a daughter or mother dies in childbirth, because she is too young to be married and bearing children, or is shunned, because she has developed fistula from traumatic childbirths or forced sexual relations, they are less able to work and support our families. We have a responsibility to protect ourselves and those around us.
- Above all, emphasise this: **the practice of child marriage does not just hurt one girl; it hurts the entire community and robs it of its dignity.**

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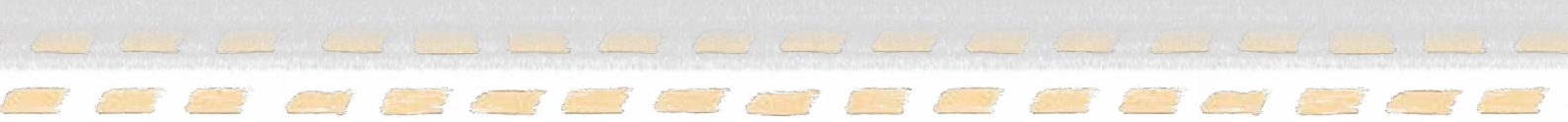
### Conversation 5:

#### What is the proper time for marriage?

#### Key points:

**The proper time for marriage is different for everyone – but successful marriages occur only when both parties are prepared, and preparation is only guaranteed when both spouses are over 18 and finished with school.**

- Marriage is not meant to be an institution of financial gain: rather, it is a partnership based on mutual love and respect, between two comparable partners, who can support themselves and their family. Both spouses must be physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually and financially prepared for marriage. This means that both husband and wife must be physically able to fully enjoy marital relations in order to bear healthy children, be able to handle household duties, raise children with love and attention, be able to love another person selflessly as God wants us, and have adequate income and means of supporting a family. (See no. 2 “Marriage is a gift from Allah and should be treated as such.”)
- Marrying a girl off for financial gain is against Allah’s wishes. This is the responsibility not only of the girl’s parents but also of the boy’s parents to avoid and fight against any financial gain from marrying a girl under 18. Therefore, as faithful Muslims, we should fight against and avoid marriages underpinned by direct or indirect material benefit. A true Muslim understands the importance of supporting the poor without taking their young girl in return. Additionally, parents are supposed to pave the way for their daughters to marry at their right age; they are not supposed to impose a high dowry or demand top-of-the-social-ladder husbands for their daughters before they are even ready to marry. (See no. 3 “We must uphold the sanctity of marriage by being properly prepared for marriage” and no. 4 “Marriage is meant to be a partnership based on love and respect.”)
- It is a fact that adolescent girls are not physically prepared to have healthy pregnancies and births. They are not mentally or emotionally prepared to love a husband, raise children, and handle household duties. They are not financially prepared to support themselves. If we pull them out of school to marry them early, we stunt them spiritually, and in all of these ways – which is the greatest tragedy of all.

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- Prosperity and community growth comes from choice: give your children the choice of whom to marry and when.

**Key facts:**

- Girls who are married under the age of 18 are often forced to drop out of school, discontinuing their education and seriously limiting their future.
- Children and youth under 18, especially those who have left school, are often not ready to shoulder the responsibilities of a spouse and family.
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**Quick Tips:**

- Be sure that your congregants understand that marriage is a path to spiritual peace and righteousness for both spouses. Marrying a young girl, when she is not fully prepared to be a wife and mother, has the opposite effect and does not breed mutual love or spiritual growth.
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## **SAVE LIVES AND SEEK JUSTICE**

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[www.nca.no](http://www.nca.no)

E-mail: [nca-oslo@nca.no](mailto:nca-oslo@nca.no)

Telephone: +47 22 09 27 00 Fax: +47 22 09 27 20

Street address: Bernhard Getz' gate 3, 0165 Oslo, Norway

Postal address: P.O. Box 7100, St. Olavs plass, 0130 Oslo, Norway

Account no.: 1594 22 87248



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