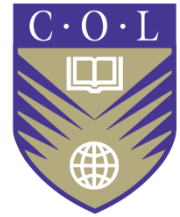


Preventing Child Early and Forced Marriage



Presentation Transcript

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This presentation has been prepared with my colleague Frances Ferreira, who leads our work on child early and forced marriage.

An estimated 63 million girls are not enrolled in primary and secondary schools. And as a religious leader in India puts it: ‘If girls are not educated, they are compelled to early marriages. Most of these girls, who enter into early marriage, cannot even take care of themselves, so how can they take care of the hygiene of their children?’ It is important to engage community leaders to take ownership of this issue.

The Commonwealth of Learning is committed to promoting ‘learning for sustainable development’ and women’s equality and empowerment are central to that vision. COL uses distance learning and technologies to reach the unreached women and girls in developing countries. Research shows that distance learning is generally preferred by women and girls as it allows them to study at their own pace, place and time.

As many countries achieve UPE, the transition rates to secondary education continue to be low. In India the enrolment in lower secondary is 86% while in Uganda the percentage drops to 31. Access remains inequitable, especially in rural areas, where girls are particularly disadvantaged.

Why is it important to invest in secondary education? Researchers have established the link between secondary education and economic opportunity. Riboud et al show that groups that have attained education beyond the primary level in Bangladesh, India Pakistan and Sri Lanka find employment much faster than those who haven’t. Furthermore, research shows that TVE skills gained in school not only increase retention and completion but result in a transition to work. It is clear that secondary education has a major role in social and economic development. Yet many governments do not have the resources to provide brick and mortar solutions.

COL believes that open schooling is a viable solution to providing secondary schooling at scale. It means the physical separation of the learner from the teacher, the use of unconventional teaching methods and ICTs and in general a flexible approach so that learners can study at their own pace place and time. This makes it particularly useful for girls and women who cannot go to school.

How is open schooling conducted? It uses self-instructional materials and learners get tutorial support at study centres which are established in partnership with existing schools, NGOs and other partners. Open schools can operate at scale and the National Institute of Open Schooling has a current cumulative enrolment of 2.7 million students.

This scale makes open schooling very cost-effective and the open school costs one tenth of what it would take to put a student through a government school in India.

COL also promotes skills development for livelihoods using blended approaches. Video and TV are popular technologies as are basic mobile phones. As a result of this training, Rehana Khatun has started a poultry enterprise in Bangladesh. This enables her to contribute to her family income.

Open schooling and skills development are particularly helpful for girls who are prevented from attending schools by barriers such as early marriage, cultural norms and distance from schools.

COL's work builds on Canada's international advocacy efforts to end child early and forced marriage. Thanks to grants from Global Affairs Canada, and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia, COL will use distance learning and technology to support the schooling and skilling of girls and women.

Under this project 45,000 girls and women will have the opportunity to either complete secondary school or be trained in some skill for employment or entrepreneurship over the next three years.

COL is working with partners in five Commonwealth countries, where child early and forced marriage is highly prevalent. These are Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Mozambique and Tanzania.

Anna Lorenzo from Belize says: 'Online schooling is very good especially for me; because when I decided to go back to finish my secondary education I was a bit nervous about being back in the classroom, since I had been out of school for 12 years...I believe if we have the right support for Open Schooling in Belize many people will go back to finish their education.'

Here is Khadija from Bangladesh who tells us 'My father wants girls to get married as early as possible. He believes that only the boys should have an education, not the girls. So my father wants me to get married, but I did not want to destroy my life by getting married at an early age. I want to continue my study to become independent. Right now I am continuing my studies at the Open School in Dhaka with because I firmly believe that education can change my social position.' Because girls are aware of the opportunities that exist, they are able to resist early and forced marriage.

The model for the skills training will have three components: technical skills decided by the community, financial literacy and life skills.

The training will be conducted by using both technology and face to face methods. COL has developed Aptus or the Classroom without Walls to reach girls and women in remote locations. Aptus is an innovative, low-cost device developed by COL that allows learners in regions with poor or limited broadband connectivity to benefit from digital resources and learning networks by way of an off-grid, offline virtual classroom.

COL has used various technologies to skill girls at scale. What are some of the key elements of our approach? One, we link the learner with the labour market and access to financial institutions. Two, COL builds the capacity of partner organisations and individuals so that the project is sustained even we are no longer present. Three, COL facilitates the use of available and affordable technologies, which is critical to ensuring that the existing digital divide can be closed.

Thank you for your kind attention.