



Policy Options for Action to Address Child Marriage in Asia

Kiran Bhatia
Regional Gender Adviser
UNFPA Asia Pacific Regional Office
4 June 2014



Overview

- Global realities
- Gross violation of rights
- Determinants of child marriage
- The Burden on adolescents
- Key Challenges
- The Way Ahead



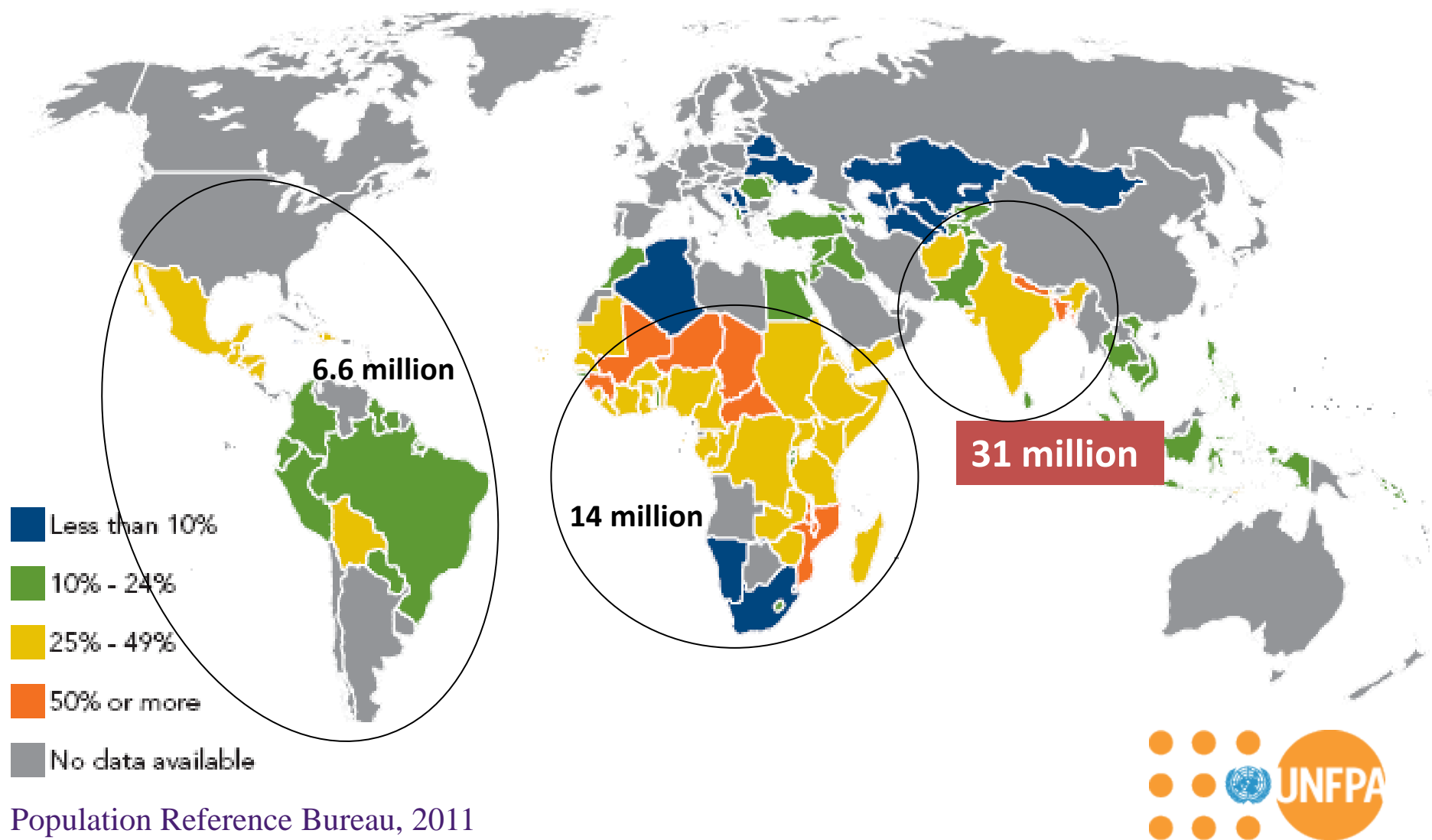
Child marriage:

A global problem ignored too long...

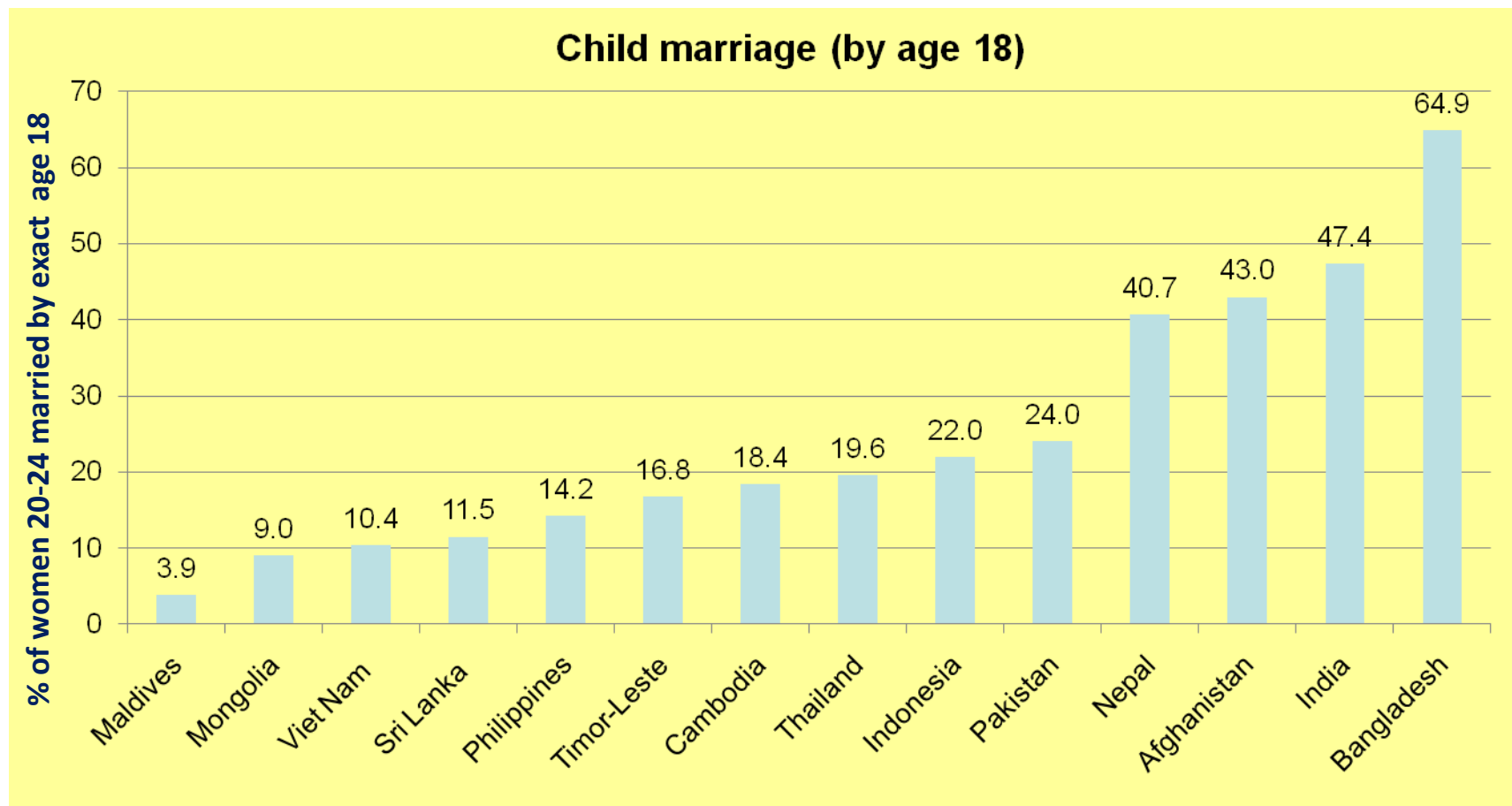
- An estimated 100 million girls over next decade may be subject to forced and early (under 18) marriages that are both illegal and dangerous
- Millions more experience life-altering and life-threatening early, unplanned, and unwanted pregnancies
- About 16 million girls aged 15-19 give birth each year. In nine out of ten cases the girl is already married



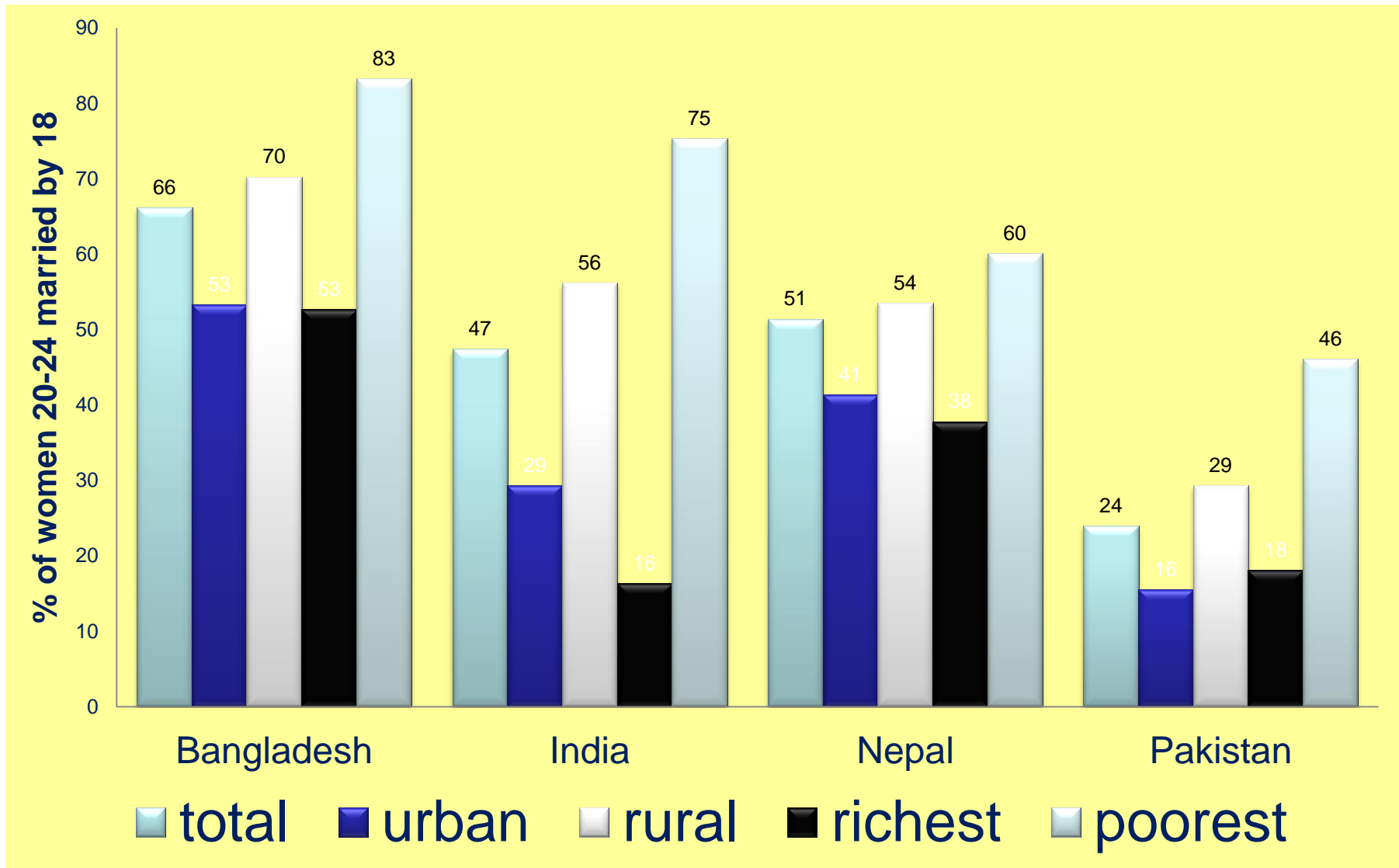
Child Marriage: Global Prevalence



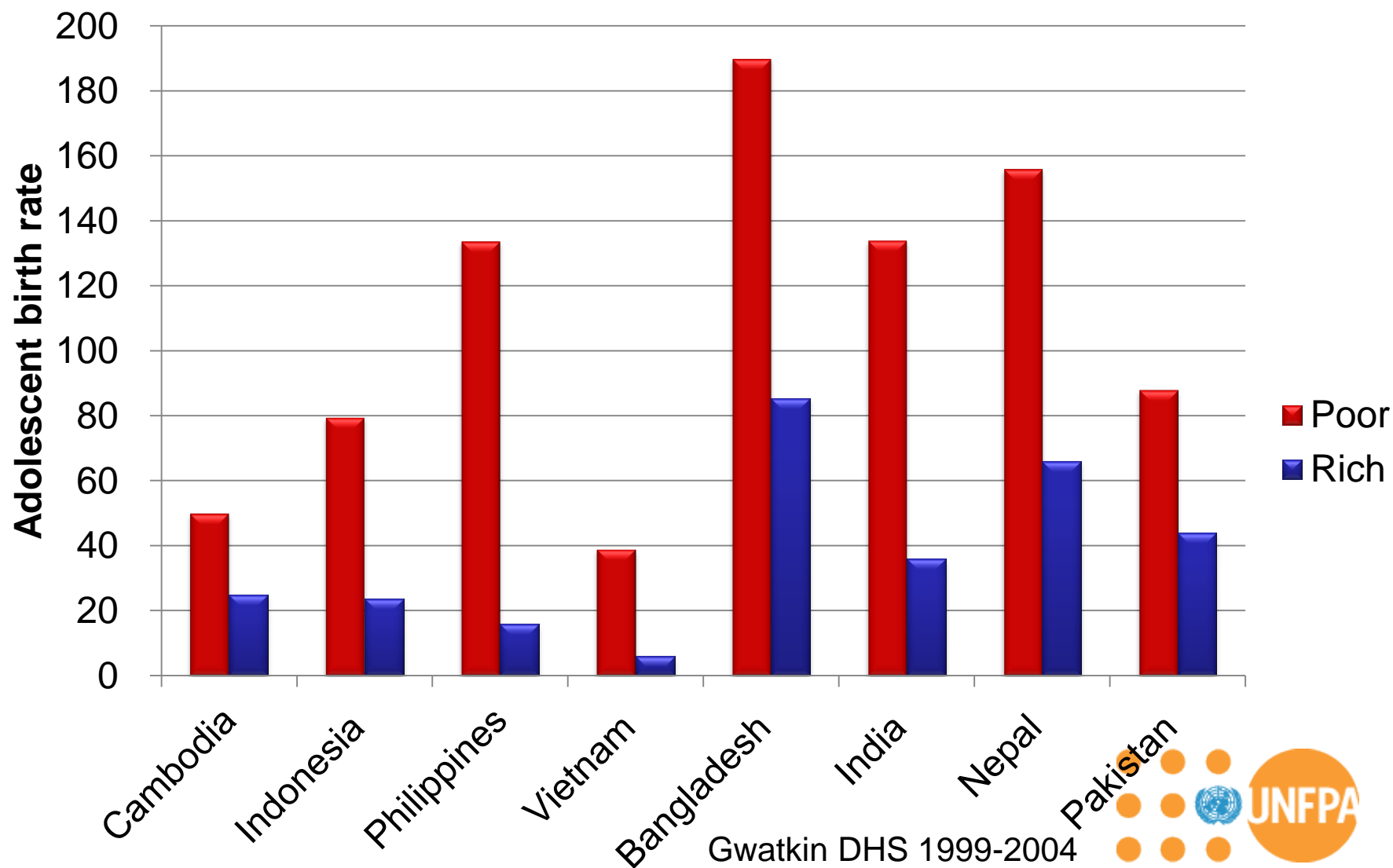
Child Marriage in Asia



Child Marriage: Higher in Poorer Quintiles



Poorer adolescent girls have higher fertility

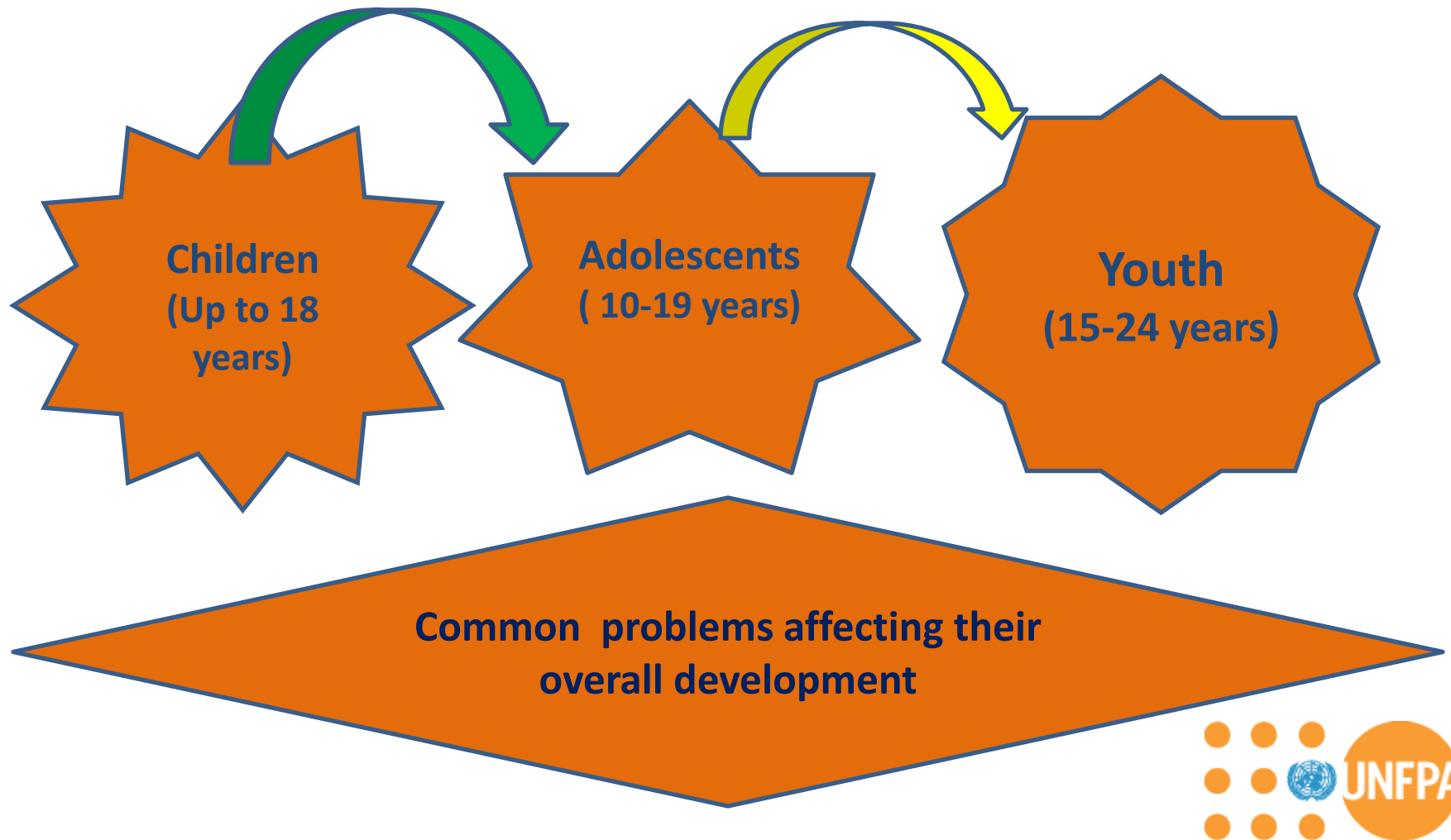


An example from Nepal: Adolescent Girls Vulnerability to poor Health and fulfilling Reproductive Rights

- About **35 percent of population is under 14 years** and the youth group aged 15-24 constitutes 20 percent of the country's total population
- About **3 million adolescent girls aged 10 to 19** live in Nepal.
- Young girls with no education are nearly four times more likely to begin having children (31.6%) than those who complete school and pursue a higher education (8%) *NDHS, 2011*
- Nearly **3 out of 10 girls of 15-19 years are married** (least educated, poor and living in rural areas) and **86% are not using contraceptives (NDHS, 2011).**



Definition of Children, Adolescents and Youth: *overlapping challenges:*



India: Factsheet

Indicators	Value
Percentage of women aged 20-24 married before age 18 (NFHS-3)	47.4
Percentage of women aged 20-24 married before age 15 (NFHS-3)	18.2
Percentage of women aged 20-24 who had already given birth by 18 years of age (NFHS-3)	21.7
Percentage of women aged 20-24 who had already given birth by 15 years of age (NFHS-3)	3.4

Risks and Vulnerabilities

- Large populations of girls at risk of sexual exploitation inside and outside of marriage:
 - **Girls age 10-14 at risk of child marriage**
(i.e. living in areas with high prevalence of child marriage)
 - **Girls age 10-19 at risk of early and unwanted pregnancy** (i.e. living in areas with low age at first birth and low contraceptive prevalence)
 - **Girls 10-19 years already married/pregnant and/or given birth**

Child Marriage and Education

- A **third of women** aged 20-24 in the developing world were married as children
- Predominantly an issue in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, yet **1 in 5 females in East Asia and the Pacific** is married before the age of 18
- Girls who marry early often **abandon formal education** and become pregnant
- Evidence shows **the more education a girl receives**, the less likely she is to marry as a child



The Loss of Rights for Adolescent Girls

Rights irremediably lost

- Experiencing forced sex
- Having a child under 18 years
- Suffering Harmful practices
- Being infected with HIV

Rights costly to recover

- Interrupted education can be

Remediated through catch-up programs but at a high cost

Rights delayed

- No control over earnings even though adolescent work is legally allowed and highly prevalent



The Underlying Causes

- Gender inequality
- Obstacles to human rights
- Poverty
- Sexual violence and coercion
- Poor implementation of laws
- National policies restricting access to contraception, age- appropriate sexuality education
- Lack of access to education and reproductive health services
- Underinvestment in adolescent girls' human capital



Structured deep rooted inequality:

Girls from birth lack the same perceived value as boys

- **Unequal gender norms** put a much higher value on boys and men than on girls and women.
- **Poor investment:** families and communities discount the benefits of educating and investing in their daughters' development.
- **A safeguard against premarital sex:** girls' perceived value may shift once they reach puberty
- **Transfer of 'Protection' of girls** from sexual harassment and violence from father to husband.
- **An economic burden** : a means for settling familial debts / disputes, or securing social, economic or political alliances.
- **Customary requirements** - dowry or bride prices :lower dowry for younger brides.

Girls- An Economic Burden:

an analysis from Bangladesh

- ✓ **Poverty / Dowry** was the most widely cited cause of child marriage
- ✓ **Lack of education / School drop-out.** 72% of girls drop out of secondary level education as a direct result of early marriage (*2010 study by Save The Children Bangladesh*).
- ✓ **Attitudes and values.** Girls are seen as an unproductive, economic 'burden'
- ✓ **Birth registration:** the lack of registration results in false age notification of the couple to be married by parents, children and the marriage registrar.
- ✓ **Lack of awareness** of parents, kazi (marriage registrar) and fathers or leaders of the negative health and protection consequences of child marriage for girls and boys was also frequently cited as a cause of child marriage

Bangladesh: World Vision Study 2012



Challenges: Harmful Practices

- Diverse range of harmful practices with life threatening often irreparable consequences impacting health and survival of girls
- Patriarchal systems and structures; persistent impunity and poor reduction of neglect, discrimination, abuse, violence.



ICPD Global Survey 2013: Preliminary findings for Asia- Pacific

Key Barriers

Issues regarding SRHR	% countries
Prevailing local customs / social practices	32.5
Lack of cultural acceptability	32.5
Low status of women / woman's empowerment	27.5
Opposition of spouse / partner	25.0
Low literacy rates / level of education	22.5

Diverse Range of Harmful Practices Impact Girls' Survival & Well-being

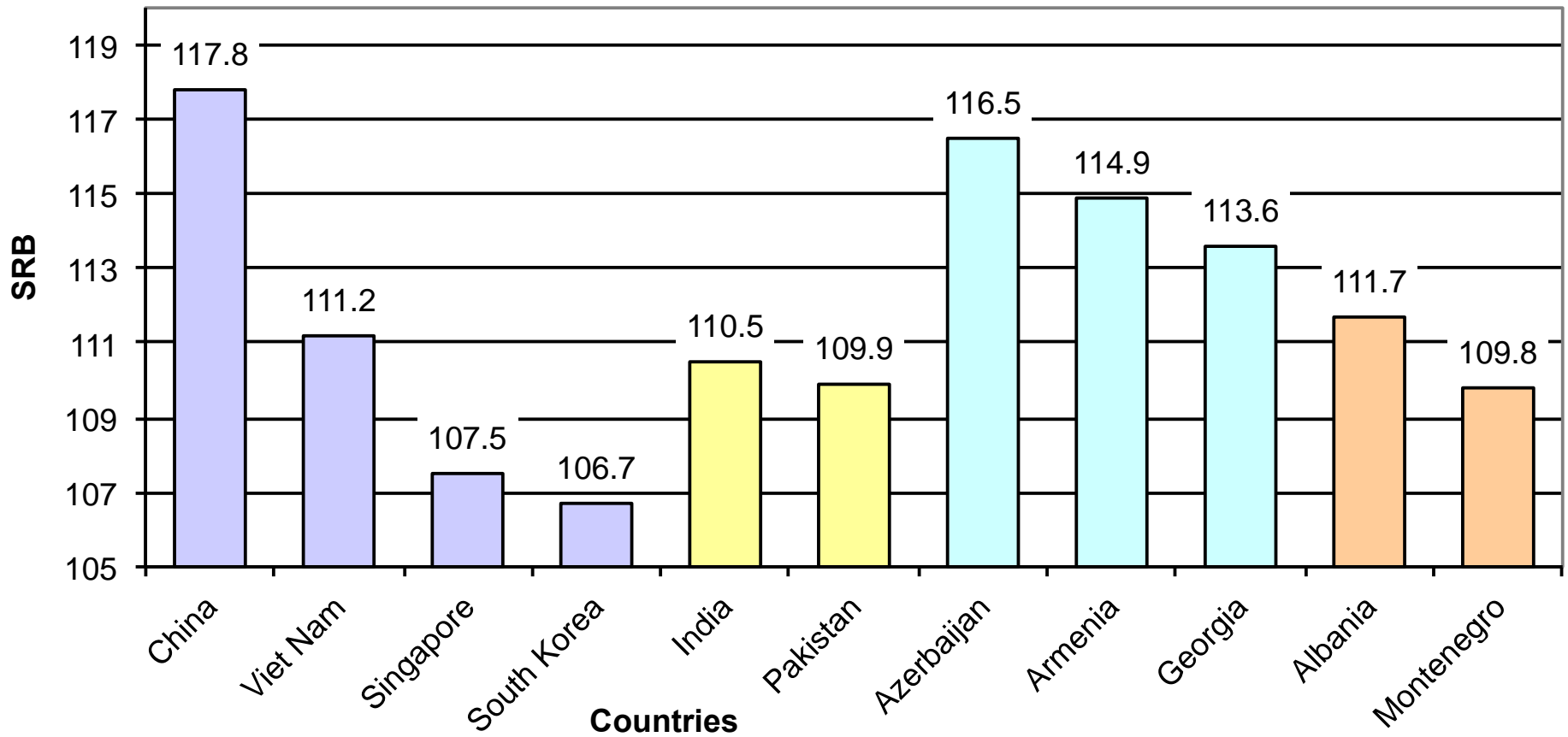
- **Gender biased sex selection**
- **Infanticide**
- **Dowry**
- **Customary practices**, including
 - female genital cutting/mutilation;
 - honour killings;
 - devadasi or dueki ,
 - niyogi (the marriage of a widow to the deceased husband's younger brother),
 - vani and swara (forced marriages of girls in compensation /settle debts or disputes

5Ds of Son Preference

- Deeply **rooted** in patriarchal culture and religious beliefs
- Detrimental **impacts** on women's and girls' health and well being
- Drives **gender biased sex-selective abortion** → skewed sex ratios at birth
- One in five men in India desire **more sons** than daughters
- A manifestation of gender discrimination and inequality

To combat the practice, need to understand men's views on son preference and gender equality and how linked to men's conceptions of manhood.

Skewed Sex Ratio at Birth



Gender Biased Sex Selection: *Emerging Consequences*

Consequences for women

- **Increased exploitation** of women, female trafficking, gender-based violence.
- **Pressure on women to marry** and bear children
- Less political voice

....and on society

- **Change in marriage patterns** and family structures
- **Potential increase in antisocial behavior**, social unrest, crime, aids prevalence, migrations, violence

Consequences for men

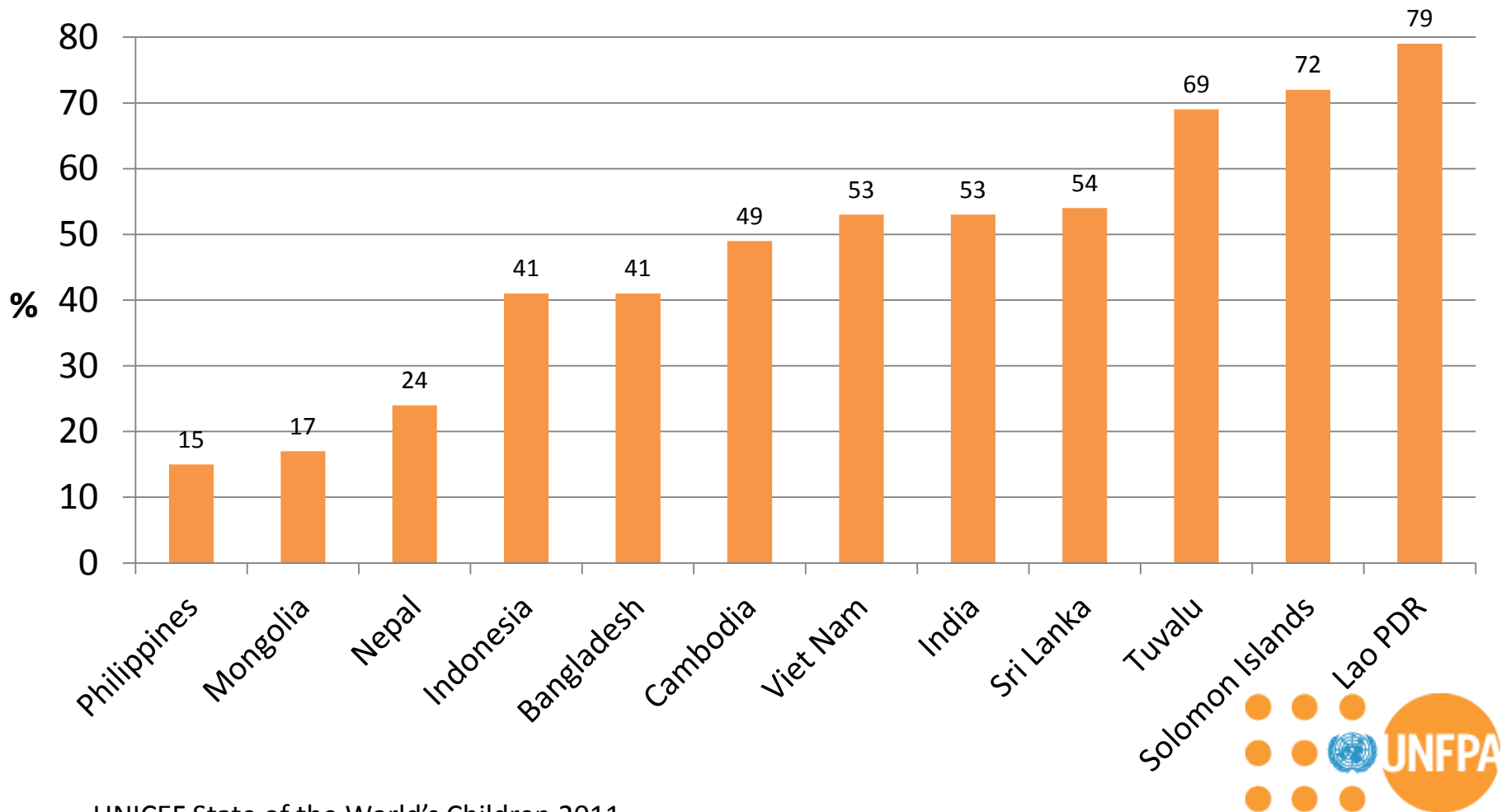
- **Delayed marriage** among men
 - Increased resort to prostitution, trafficking, etc.
- **Increasing competition** among unmarried men
 - Impact on savings and education investments
- **Increase in involuntary non-marriage**
 - Impact stronger among the vulnerable men: poorer, less educated, from remote areas
 - Inability to perpetuate the family line

Challenges: Violence Against Women and Girls



High Levels of Acceptability of Violence

Adolescents girls aged 15–19 who think that a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife under certain circumstances



Challenges: Legal Reform

- Since ICPD, 158 countries have passed laws to increase the legal age of marriage to age 18
- However, enforcement, prosecution, and punishment of perpetrators of child marriage are lacking

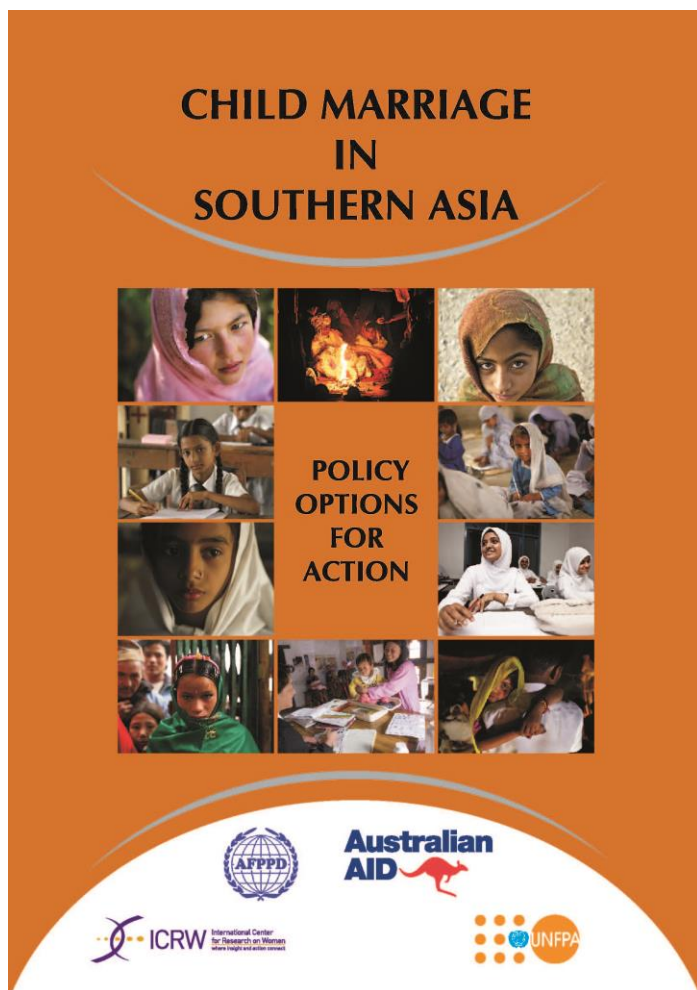


CSW 2013: Agreed Conclusions

Review, enact and strictly enforce laws and regulations concerning the minimum legal age of consent and the minimum age for marriage, raising the minimum age for marriage where necessary, and generate social support for the enforcement of these laws in order to end the practice of child, early and forced marriage;



Challenges: Leadership by Parliamentarians



- Despite past efforts, limited results in policy implementation
- Limited follow up and linkages across sub- regions
- Gap in high level positioning by parliamentarians on harmful practices



The Way Ahead...

“What is needed is a new way of thinking about the challenge of adolescent pregnancy. Instead of viewing the girl as the problem and changing her behaviour as the solution, governments, communities, families and schools should see poverty, gender inequality, discrimination, lack of access to services, and negative views about girls and women as the real challenges, and the pursuit of social justice, equitable development and the empowerment of girls as the true pathway to fewer adolescent pregnancies.”

Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin, Executive Director, UNFPA



Eight Ways to Get There

1. **Girls 10 to 14:** Preventive interventions for young adolescents
2. **Child marriage:** Stop marriage under 18, prevent sexual violence and coercion
3. **Multilevel approaches:** Build girls' assets across the board; keep girls on healthy, safe life trajectories
4. **Human rights:** Protect rights to health, education, security and freedom from poverty
5. **Education:** Get girls in school and enable them to stay enrolled longer
6. **Engage men and boys:** Help them be part of the solution
7. **Sexuality education and access to services:** Expand age-appropriate information, provide health services used by adolescents
8. **Equitable development:** Build a post-MDG framework based on human rights, equality, sustainability



"Child marriage is an appalling violation of human rights and robs girls of their education, health and long-term prospects. A girl who is married as a child is one whose potential will not be fulfilled. Since many parents and communities also want the very best for their daughters, we must work together and end child marriage"

Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin, Executive Director, UNFPA





Thank You

Acknowledgements:

Information for this presentation has been drawn from various sources from UNFPA ,UNICEF, UNESCO, ICRW, Plan, SACG (South Asia Coordination Group), ESCAP.