




MY BODY. MY LIFE. MY CHOICE: CHALLENGING FORCED MARRIAGE

FRIDA Special Impact Report

The Issue, Groups, and Strategies 2014-15





The FRIDA grant supported us in providing us the confidence and the basic support in raising our voice against child marriages. Money plays a very important role in providing firm support to a cause, as we could have done the work voluntarily but without this grant we would not have been able to reach to as many people as we did.

Girls United for Human Rights, Pakistan
FRIDA Grantee Partner since 2014



INTRODUCTION

THE ISSUE

Forced marriage refers to instances where one or both persons do not (or cannot) give their full and free consent to the marriage. The terms early and child marriage are also commonly used to refer to young people below the legal consent-giving age being forced into marriage. This practice is often a result of cultural, religious and even economic reasons and disproportionately affects girls and women. As forced marriages are often unofficial and undocumented, specific and reliable statistics on forced marriage are difficult to come by, however, the practice is widespread, particularly so in developing countries.

Despite increasing calls against child marriage and the establishment of legislature against it, it is estimated that one in every three girls is married before reaching age eighteen. As per the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), forced marriage is a human rights violation which is a threat to women's lives, health and future prospects. It very often leads to early pregnancies which exposes girls to the risk of complications in pregnancy and childbirth, it affects their ability to actively engage or even attend school and therefore limits the possibility of economic independence from their 'spouse'. These marriages are also more likely to be characterized by violence as the relationship is based on the power of one spouse over another. Forced marriage therefore locks young women into repressive and psychologically damaging relationships.

Since its establishment, FRIDA has funded six groups working on forced marriage and awarded a total of US\$ 40 000 in grants.

WHY THIS REPORT

In the 2015/16 grant-making cycle alone, FRIDA received forty-one applications from groups seeking funding to address forced marriage in their communities. This indicates to us that this is a critical issue that young feminist organizers wanted to address in their own ways and in their own communities.

FRIDA believes young women, girls, and trans*youth are experts of their own reality as a matter of respect and dignity. This underlines our commitment to working with these grassroots leaders as change agents and amplifying their strategic legitimacy in speaking about issues that directly affect them, their friends and peers, and the entire community.

This report reviews the work of five young women- and girl-led groups tackling the root causes and effects of forced marriage in 2014-2015. These groups were all selected through FRIDA's participatory grantmaking process, whereby all grant applicants vote on what they think are the best proposals in their region. These groups received the highest votes and received US\$ 4000 direct grant and a US\$ 1000 grant since becoming a FRIDA grantee partner. FRIDA's grant enables grantee partners identify and address organizational development needs as well as carry out project activities, often something many young, emerging groups lack owing to the greater hierarchies that exist around funding for young feminists worldwide. **Prior to being funded by FRIDA, only two of the groups had ever received funding before.**

This report is the first of an ongoing series that aims to profile the unique impact of young feminist organizers. We share this report with our community to thank them for their ongoing support. Furthermore, we hope this report will reach other women's rights organizations, funders, governments, universities, activists, and others so that the impact of young feminist organizers is more acknowledged and included in our collective struggle for social justice and equality. The change we all seek can be achieved much faster if young organizers are more meaningfully acknowledged, engaged, and funded.



THE GROUPS



Guivlipen, Romania
Grantee Partner since 2014

In the 2014/15 grant cycle, FRIDA provided direct and capacity developments grants to the following five groups in the Global South working on Forced Marriage as a primary and secondary focus area.

Foundation for Civic Education and Social Empowerment (FOCESE) was founded in 2013 in Balaka, Malawi by girls who experienced pressure to marry early and aims to reduce the school drop out rate of girls due to early pregnancies and forced marriage.

Radio Udayapur, a community based radio station was formed in 2009 by young women and girls based in Udayapur, Nepal. The use this platform to challenge the practice of forced marriage in Nepal and refer to this project as “Un-veiling”.

Girls United for Human Rights was founded by girls aged 12 – 15 in 2015 with the mission to empower disenfranchised girls in the rural areas of Pakistan.

Giuvlipen was formed in 2014 in Romania to ensure the visibility of Roma women by addressing the rejection of Roma identity, the negative impact school drop out and forced marriage.

Collectif Vivre Ma Vie was founded in 2012 in Burkina Faso to empower young women to stand against forced marriage and sensitize community members in girls and women's rights.



Member of Collectif Vivre
Ma Vie, Burkina Faso,
Grantee Partner since 2013

THE STRATEGIES

Each of the groups supported by FRIDA are using the tried and tested strategy of sensitization and awareness-raising. However, they are implementing this strategy in unique and creative ways.

This sensitization is done with a wide variety of stakeholders, from parents, teachers, community and religious leaders as well as the girls themselves. The sensitization and awareness initiatives carried out with the girls are largely geared towards giving young women and girls not just the information on their rights but also to encourage them to have the confidence to speak up for themselves. Beyond information, the groups also assist girls to return to/stay in school through financial assistance and moral support. The following sections highlight the key ways these groups are using new methods to raise awareness and the voices of young women and girls affected.

BREAKING TABOO: YOUNG WOMEN SPEAKING UP!

Radio Udayapur use their radio show to share stories about young women as well as have young women share their own stories of forced marriages on the show. The very fact that young girls themselves are speaking up about the issue serves as a powerful advocacy tool against child marriage. It breaks taboos about women speaking up, and acts as encouragement for other girls to speak up despite being traditionally silenced; this has mainly been evident in a 29% overall (combined membership numbers) increase in membership from 2013 to 2015.²

The practice of child marriage is increasingly denounced by victims, who are breaking the silence around it.

Collectif Vivre Ma Vie, FRIDA Grantee Partner since 2014



Jalumaya Tamang is a 17 year old woman from Dharu district in Nepal; an underdeveloped and poverty stricken area with no secondary school and no electricity. While Jalumaya wanted to continue her studies, her parents wanted her to get married. Jalumaya called Radio Udayapur and shared her story – it was later discussed on air while Jalumaya's parents were listening and heard their daughters concerns and dreams and afterwards made the decision to send her to school. Jalumaya is now volunteering with Radio Udayapur as a Media intern.

Radio Udayapur, Nepal
FRIDA Grantee Partner
since 2013





Performance by Giuvlipen, Romania,
Grantee Partner since 2014

TRIGGERING DIALOGUE THROUGH THEATRE

Theatre for Development is an approach which allows for groups and individuals to develop and perform plays to tell their own story and/or address matters that are relevant to them. Performances are often followed by discussion with audiences and development of strategies to address the matters. The theatre for development approach is used by Giuvlipen in Romania, to present scenario which will allow for in-depth discussion on key themes around gender equality and specifically the negative impact of child marriage on girls lives.

This approach opens a unique space to build awareness on the effects of forced marriage as well as for open discussion on how to address these. Furthermore, it encourages consensus building in the community to challenge the patriarchal norms around forced marriage. Radio Udayapur uses a similar approach by conducting performances on the street to reach a wide audience.

THE IMPACT

This section looks more closely at the immediate impact of these groups' work. We find that groups were able to bring about significant change in the day to day lives of girls, as well as build the groundwork for cultural shift.

EMPOWERING YOUNG WOMEN

In total, the interventions of these five groups led to the re-entry and or continuance of primary and secondary school for 32 young women, 30 of whom are teenage mothers. The overall longterm effects of girls having access to education are well documented in research (and one can also easily imagine the importance of school). It empowers girls and has overall positive economic effects within communities as well.

More importantly, young girls and women have been empowered to speak up and break the silence; indicated in the increased uptake of planned parenthood methods (5 girls in Burkina Faso), the reporting of early/forced marriage by 1 girl to the FOCES group and 2 girls in Pakistan who reached out to GUHR.



After our performance, we had discussions with the audience about the topics debated (early marriage and gender roles in Roma communities) and on many occasions the women were feeling empowered to claim their rights in polemics with the men.

Guivlipen, Romania, Grantee Partner since 2014



Foundation for Civic Education and
Social Empowerment, Malawi
Grantee Partner since 2014

ENGAGING LOCAL LEADERSHIP

As a result of their efforts, groups were able to increase political will and support for fighting against child marriage in their communities. In Malawi, this has been illustrated by the active participation of government officials in FOCES's campaigns as well as local leaders (village heads). This not only gave the group greater legitimacy and validation, it created a more enabling environment for the group to conduct its advocacy activities as they had safer access to the community without fearing as much backlash. Through their advocacy, village heads agreed to a fining system for parents who force their children into marriage and passed new bylaws that stipulate that a girl who falls pregnant can no longer be forced into marriage and is allowed to return to school.

Meanwhile in Pakistan, GUHR's sensitization activities included reaching out to Imams to join them in awareness raising initiatives by inviting them to share their Islamic understanding and knowledge against forced marriages and changing any wrong perceptions on child marriage being a part of the religion. In communities where practices such as these have been occurring for several generations and justified through religion – this acts as a powerful anti-forced marriage message. The potential impact of the involvement of religious leaders is that it can lead to faster and long lasting perception change and therefore behavior change. Similarly, traditional leaders, often viewed as 'custodians of the culture', also lend this credibility to the grantee groups advocacy.

Unfortunately, for Girls United for Human Rights in Pakistan, membership declined by 40% due to families reluctance to have their children involved as well as the increased threats against the group which was a result of their increased visibility and amplified voice after receiving their first funding from FRIDA.

As a result of these grantee partners work, they contribute to challenging the justifications for forced marriage, which in turn will act as a catalyst for behavior change within communities, creating an environment which is supportive of rather than a barrier to the empowerment of girls.



A man shows his support as part of a signature campaign that was organized by Girls United for Human Rights to get the maximum support from the community in favour of pro girl legislation, especially child marriage bill in Swat, Pakistan.

CONCLUSION

FRIDA is committed to young feminist organizing because it offers critical new perspectives, energies, and actions to end gender inequality. To better understand the collective impact achieved by the groups we support, we apply the Gender @ Work Framework, which looks at four different categories of change needed to be able to achieve transformational social change.⁴ As the box to the right summarizes, we have seen groups working in each of these categories and making both immediate and steady progress towards eliminating the practice of forced marriage.

We are motivated by the increased number of projects, programs, and organizations that are working to end forced marriage. It takes a myriad of actors and strategies to be able to create transformational change at multiple levels and in different ways. However, we still find there is a persistent lack of meaningful inclusion and acknowledgment of young feminist activist-led groups. **We hope this report encourages more actors to better engage young women and girls as strategic leaders and decision-makers in their own right as they are the survivors of forced marriage themselves, or the friends, sisters, and classmates of these survivors.**

OVERALL IMPACT ACHIEVED BY YOUNG FEMINIST LED GROUPS TO END FORCED MARRIAGE:

Access to opportunities

**Girls are enabled
to stay in or return
to school**

Individual consciousness

**Girls have increased
awareness on their
rights and agency**

Systems and policies

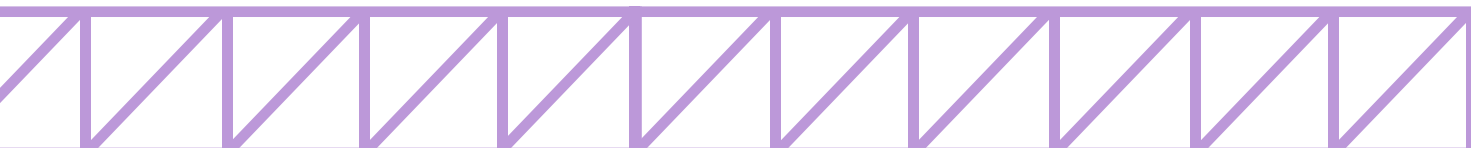
**By-laws and fines are
imposed by local
leaders against forced
and child marriage**

Cultures and attitudes

**Religious and community
leaders support and
engage in advocacy
against forced marriage**

We find that a distinct characteristic of the groups supported by FRIDA is that they enact multi-faceted approaches that use a sophisticated analysis of current power structures. **Whether it is the power of a parent over their teenage daughter, the local leadership's lack of intervention, or the influence of cultural traditions, these groups combat these forces simultaneously by mobilizing their own collective powers. When they come together, they have the confidence to speak to their parents, lobby their governments, and offer new traditions.** This is why we also believe that supporting young feminists is key to the expansion, rejuvenation and sustainability of women's movements and organizations, both now and in the future.

The contributions of each of the groups highlighted in this report is significant: small ripples that changed the day to day lives of the groups' members and participants are parts of a greater wave of generational change for the future.



End Notes

1. UNFPA:

<http://www.unfpa.org/child-marriage>

2. Combined membership numbers.

3. For more information, see: The Girl Effect:

<http://www.girleffect.org>

Girls Not Brides:

<http://www.girlsnotbrides.org>

4. For more information, see Gender At Work:

<http://www.genderatwork.org>

Credits and thanks

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FRIDA | The Young Feminist Fund

Flexibility Resources Inclusivity Diversity Action

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Founded in 2010, FRIDA is the only youth-led fund focused exclusively on supporting global young feminist activism to advance social justice movements and agendas. We believe in the collective power, expertise, and innovation of young feminist organizers to address root causes and structures of inequality in order to create lasting change in their communities.