



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

# **Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development**

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FAAE • NUMBER 046 • 2nd SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

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**EVIDENCE**

**Thursday, February 19, 2015**

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**Vice-Chair**

**Mr. Paul Dewar**



# Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

Thursday, February 19, 2015

•(1135)

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP)):** Colleagues, we'll get started.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) we are continuing our study of protection of children and youth in developing countries. Today we have three guests.

From the United Nations Population Fund we have Dianne Stewart. Just to let folks around the table know, she'll be available until 12:45, so keep that in mind.

Joining us by teleconference is Sarah Moorcroft, who is the international program manager for Street Kids International. Joining her is Olivia Lecoufle, who is with Save the Children. She's a child protection adviser. They are joining us by phone.

Let me say to our witnesses, our guests, that we'll hear from you first and then have the committee ask questions.

We'll start with you, Ms. Stewart, please.

**Ms. Dianne Stewart (Director, Information and External Relations Division, United Nations Population Fund):** Honourable members, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

Right now as I speak to you, a young girl of perhaps no more than 10 or 11, poor, most likely living in a remote rural area, is being forced to leave the only home she has ever known. She's frightened, confused, and above all powerless to stop the transaction taking place: her marriage to a much older man, a complete stranger. Today is the day that her childhood ends and along with it her education, her aspirations, and any chance of reaching her full potential. It is a brutal violation of her human rights.

This cruel scenario plays out again and again. Every two seconds a girl under the age of 18 is married, most often without free, prior, or informed consent. If current trends continue, an additional 142 million girls will be married before their 18th birthday by the year 2020. About 16 million girls aged 15 to 19 give birth each year, and complications from pregnancy and childbirth are the second leading cause of death among girls in that age group. Many of those pregnancies result from non-consensual sex, and nine out of ten of those take place within early marriages.

In many countries, adolescence is a time when life opens up for boys but closes down for girls. The vital transitions on the path to adulthood are often diverted or interrupted by harmful practices such as child, early, or forced marriage and female genital mutilation; by sexual violence; by adolescent pregnancy; and by lack of access to

sexual and reproductive health services. The consequences in loss of health, empowerment, education, and opportunities for work are profound. Communities and societies feel the impact too. Most development goals related to gender, health, and education will not be achieved without addressing these issues.

Millions of adolescent girls and young women live in deep poverty. They may be working in domestic service or under unsafe occupations or be engaged in exploitative sex work. They may be migrants or affected by conflict or disaster, situations in which young women and girls are often at the highest risk of poor sexual and reproductive health, violence, and exploitation.

It is unacceptable that these human rights violations continue to threaten the lives and futures of so many women and girls. UNFPA is unequivocally committed to promoting and protecting human rights, including the rights of young people and especially the rights of adolescent girls. We believe that when they can claim their right to health, including access to sexual and reproductive health, to education, and to decent work, they become powerful agents of social and economic development.

That is why we have scaled up our program focus on adolescent girls, supporting national governments and local partners with targeted investments aimed at reaching the most marginalized adolescent girls at the highest risk of the most severe human rights violations. We do these by focusing on interventions that delay marriage and pregnancy and that enhance girls' autonomy, their access to social networks, and their participation in civil life; by reducing school dropouts; by creating an enabling environment that upholds the girls' rights; and by ensuring that they have access to sexual and reproductive health and rights and HIV knowledge and practices; and also by increasing the demand for high-quality, rights-based family planning.

We thank the Government of Canada for your active engagement in working to make these harmful practices history. Canada is a close and strategic partner of UNFPA, and empowering adolescent girls and ending child marriage is part and parcel of the world we all want. We rely on Canada and other partners to proactively engage in high-level advocacy to raise the profile of these issues in political processes, such as the post-2015 negotiations. As we have seen around the world, parliamentarians can play a powerful role in eliminating child, early, and forced marriage through their support for legal reform.

• (1140)

Honourable members, over a quarter of the world's population, 1.8 billion people, are between the ages of 10 and 24. It's the largest generation of young people the world has ever seen. Within this cohort of young people are 600 million adolescent girls.

We cannot talk about sustainable development without ensuring that the needs of young people are met, and this requires investment and commitments. We have abundant evidence to show that investing in young people, and particularly in adolescent girls, presents an enormous opportunity that can really be a game changer in addressing some of the biggest challenges we face, including extreme poverty and discrimination, and for charting a more sustainable pathway to development.

If we can ensure, for example, that the young girl I spoke of earlier stays in school, is protected from violence, protected from early marriage and other harmful practices, has access to information, and the means to protect herself from motherhood in childhood, then she is equipped with choices and is able to fulfill her potential. She and millions like her, along with her brothers, will become powerful agents for social change and will shape a better future for us all.

Thank you very much.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Paul Dewar):** Thank you.

Before we go to our next witness, I want to inform committee members that we are going to have bells at 12:02. I'm going to suggest that after we hear from our next witness, we do a quick round with all three parties. We'll figure out how much time we have to do that, but I'll make sure it's equal for everyone.

Without further ado, we'll get to our next witness, Sarah Moorcroft from Street Kids International. Please go ahead.

**Ms. Sarah Moorcroft (International Program Manager, Street Kids International):** Hi. It is a great honour to speak with you today on the situations of children and youth in developing countries and the role Canada can play in the protection and empowerment of children and youth.

Before we begin, I'd like to share with you the story of Shewaye.

Shewaye was orphaned as a child. Her father died of HIV when she was young, and she was forced to live with her uncle outside the capital city of Ethiopia. She became a victim of sexual abuse and ran away when her uncle tried to force her to work in the sex trade.

She found refuge at a shelter through the women, youth, and children's affairs office of the Ethiopian government. She had no money and no work opportunity, and she had only finished her

primary education. The government office is a partner in Street Kids International's Partnerships For Success Ethiopia project, funded by the Canadian government's Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development.

Shewaye took our youth street business course in the fall of 2013. Through our training, she developed a basket-weaving business plan and was successful in receiving a zero-per cent micro-loan of 1,000 birr, which is only around \$50 Canadian, in our business plan competition, which was enough to purchase materials and supplies to start her business. She now earns 1,000 birr every three to four weeks, which is enough to cover her living costs for rent, food, school fees, and materials. We have also helped her set up a bank account with the Addis Credit and Savings Institution to save for her future education.

Shewaye is only 16 years old, and she is one of the strongest people I have ever met. Over the past two years I have seen Shewaye's confidence grow. She has moved into her own home and can now earn enough money to support her younger sister as well. In the future she would like to move back to her village where, she explained, this type of entrepreneurship training is needed for the young people back home.

Our youth is a generation at risk. Young people below the age of 25 account for more than half of the world's population, and nearly 90% reside in developing countries. There are more than 81 million young people who live on the margins and struggle to make a living for themselves and for their families.

The sad truth is there are few if any jobs available, with a global youth unemployment rate above 12.6% and rising. For some regions, this number can be as high as 30%. This dramatic youth bulge and youth unemployment can have severe economic, social, and political consequences, specifically in low-income countries. Youth under-employment and unemployment highlight the societal failure to utilize a key labour market to foster economic growth.

Low returns to labour as well as high unemployment contribute drastically to poverty. Unemployment continues to expedite a downward spiral of instability as poverty makes it difficult for societies and individuals to invest in education and health and contributes greatly to intergenerational and gender marginalization, abuse, and violence. In such adversities, many children and youth have come to live, work, and beg on the streets. Many have been pushed out or have run away from their homes because of issues of child trafficking, abuse, sexual exploitation, and early and forced marriages, as in the case of Shewaye.

There is also a growing security threat, with a stagnant youth population and a "scarring effect" for youth excluded from the labour market for significantly long periods of time. Youth can become restless; they can become angered and distrust governments, with the possibility of leading to civil unrest and conflict.

The youth livelihood sector may be the biggest challenge today; however, it can also be one of our biggest opportunities.

What Street Kids International has found and learned from marginalized youth over the past 25 years is that this youth population is resilient. They are survivors, in the harshest economic conditions in the world. These youth will engage in all kinds of activities to survive, some healthy and some not, from dignified work to the worst forms of harmful labour.

Whether their actions go in a negative or positive direction largely depends on the young person's motivation and knowledge and the enabling relationships around them. Hazardous forms of work can have devastating impacts on a young person's life. However, evidence has also shown that it can be highly beneficial to the development and growth of adolescents as they transition into adulthood. When given opportunities for self-sufficiency and self-respect, when this population is empowered with essential economic and development life skills, they can thrive, and they do.

Street Kids International envisions a world in which youth are included in their communities as productive and positive participants, in which they have the skills, abilities, and opportunities to transition into safe, decent, and sustainable work.

● (1145)

Our mission has been to educate and empower vulnerable and marginalized youth to improve their quality of life and make their livelihood something they can be proud of. We achieve this through innovative and industry-recognized entrepreneurship and employment programs. Our programs help youth build small businesses or enter into the workforce, and learn key business concepts, networking and partnership techniques, personal and business budgeting and saving strategies, and how to overcome financial challenges and plan for the future.

What we have found is that many youth in our programs have little to no literacy skills and schooling. Therefore, we use low-literacy and youth-centred approaches such as storytelling, games, discussions, and visual aids to help make every single aspect of our programs meaningful and relevant to youth. Most importantly, we build on their own experiences and their own knowledge to strengthen their abilities to earn money and earn it in safe and decent ways.

At the beginning of this year, Street Kids International and Save the Children Canada joined together to develop a holistic youth livelihood platform, which integrates a systems approach to child protection and gender equality. Save the Children has always been a leader in child and youth protection under four key pillars: legislation and policy mechanisms of national governance; services and social welfare systems at both the national and local levels; social change to address behaviour and attitudes from individual, family, community, education, health, and law enforcement; and child and youth participation to build social dialogue and engage in meaningful participation with children and youth.

Integrated within all of those pillars is a clear and concrete understanding of gender equality. Girls and boys, young women and men face different child protection risks and challenges and different economic opportunities and barriers, as Dianne mentioned earlier. Both organizations, Street Kids International and Save the Children, share similar visions and approaches by partnering with local organizations and government. Through this merger we will expand

the scope and skill of Street Kids' entrepreneurship and employment programs with Save the Children's global presence and a child protection and gender lens to ensure that youth livelihood development both protects and enables our future generations.

Save the Children Canada led the formation of the International Child Protection Network of Canada, a coalition of Canadian NGOs formed in 2013. Street Kids International, now a part of Save the Children Canada, is a core member of this group. Drawing on the ICPNC, Street Kids International and Save the Children expertise for child and youth poverty, we would like to offer the following four recommendations to the Canadian government:

First, we need a holistic approach to youth livelihood programming, which integrates key aspects of child protection and gender equality across the life stages of a child. It is critical so they can respond to diverse vulnerabilities and inequalities as well as to act on the potential that exists as they grow, learn, and mature, and determine their place in society.

Second, we need to see increased investment in our youth. This involves investment in formal and alternative education and training with specific programs for youth entrepreneurship, apprenticeship and vocational training, life skills, financial management, and literacy training, job search counselling, and job matching. We call on this government to help support and form employment creation and livelihood diversification and make investments for youth to access safe credit, insurance, and savings programs to reduce the economic drivers of child and youth poverty.

Third, we need adequate funding for youth livelihood and child protection in emergencies. Tens of millions of children and youth are affected by conflict and disaster each year, experiencing devastating impacts on their social, emotional, and economic well-being. However, child protection and youth livelihood is among the lowest funded sectors in humanitarian aid.

Fourth, we recommend that private sector partners be accountable to children's rights and business principles. Launched in 2012 by Save the Children, UNICEF, and UN Global Compacts, these 10 principles guide and encourage businesses to respect and support children's rights and assess their impacts in the workplace, marketplace, and community.

● (1150)

Economic development has the potential to provide long-term benefits and improve the standard of living in impoverished communities; yet without attention to children's rights and protection, business operations can also have unintended negative consequences, including an increase in the worst forms of harmful child labour, unsafe working conditions, violence, and sexual exploitation of children and youth.

To conclude, girls and boys, young women and men, are our present and future power and the key to bringing peace, sustainability, and healthy societies worldwide. We believe in them, but they need our support and our provision of opportunity to positively engage in their own lives and their own futures.

Thank you for your attention.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Paul Dewar):** Thank you very much to our witnesses.

Now I need to ask the committee if they're willing to do five-minute rounds instead of seven, because the bells will be ringing for votes. My apologies to our witnesses. I know you've accommodated us once already, but your testimony is great evidence for our report. So thank you.

If it's okay with committee, can we go ahead with that, and give each party five minutes?

**Some hon. member:** Agreed.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Paul Dewar):** Okay, I'll start with the opposition.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Laverdière, you have five minutes.

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Thank you both for really fantastic, very enlightening presentations.

My first question is for Madam Stewart.

I like your approach, a rights-based approach to family planning, but you mentioned that the right to health may be impaired by a lack of sexual and reproductive health services. Very concretely, what do you think donor countries could do to help improve the situation? Thank you.

• (1155)

**Ms. Dianne Stewart:** Thank you very much for the question.

I think there are two key missing pieces here. The first is a huge demand for reproductive health commodities that is unmet. There are currently 221 million women who would like access to contraception and do not have it. Part of this is a very concrete, easily solved problem of providing those commodities. UNFPA has a huge global program in supplying commodities to countries that aren't able to manage those supplies on their own, but of course it's extremely underfunded. At the moment, just for 2015, we are \$100 million short in that program, and that's not even talking about a scale-up. That's talking about meeting current demand.

The second issue is youth-friendly services. For many young girls, their access to those kinds of services and products is curtailed by a lack of services that will even accept young women, and also a lack of availability of any kinds of services.

What we find is that even for young women who have been married, they apparently are old enough to be married to older men, but not old enough to seek those services on their own, and they

don't have permission to seek those services. The only way we get access to those young women is when they come in on their first, second, or sometimes third and nearly fatal pregnancy. We need to be making sure that those women have access to those services before they get pregnant and, in fact, access to that knowledge before they are married as children. Part of this is obviously about prevention, but there are millions of girls who were married when they were 15 or 16. They're now 20. They're on their fourth child and they still don't have access to contraceptive services or safe childbirth.

There are a lot of other services that need to be around it, but those are the two crucial interventions that would prevent these deaths.

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière:** Thank you very much. That's very interesting.

Another thing you broached briefly was sexuality education. What steps are required to put programs into place, and what kinds of outcomes can we expect?

**Ms. Dianne Stewart:** I think this is a vital issue for parliamentarians to address because what we've found is that in many countries the biggest challenge is a legal challenge to whether this can be part of an education curriculum in a country.

We advocate strongly for the fact that comprehensive sexuality education needs to be part of a high school curriculum and in fact a whole school curriculum with age-appropriate information being provided at every stage of education. Many countries have those, but even when they do have those laws in place, it's very hard to implement them. We're not only talking about developing countries here, but we're also talking about a global issue with comprehensive sexuality education.

It is a right of young people to understand how their bodies work and to have basic information about how to protect themselves and how adolescence and puberty is going to affect their lives. The challenges there are often socio-political obstacles rather than practical obstacles. We have, with our partners at UNICEF and UNESCO, developed a wide range of culturally appropriate curricula that can be deployed in various countries and at various age groups. The challenge is more social and political in terms of getting that accepted. For many of these adolescent girls, particularly the most marginalized, they're not in school or they're at danger of dropping out of school. How do we reach them? That's why our action for adolescent girls program is a holistic community-based intervention that creates safe spaces within the community for girls to get that information.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Paul Dewar):** Thank you very much, Ms. Stewart and Madam Laverdière.

Now we'll go to Ms. Brown, from the government.

**Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, ladies, for the discussions with us this morning.

I happened to be at the Girl Summit last summer in England with David Cameron. The father of Malala was there and he spoke quite eloquently. I wrote down what he said: "We should work on tomorrow's fathers. Why should I be a different father to my daughter than I am to my son?"

I think that's an issue we do need to work on, because what you've talked about really are discussions about changes in legislation that need to take place.

I was in Mozambique last March as part of a parliamentary delegation. There was a piece of legislation that was supposed to have been introduced in the house that said if a girl under the age of 14 was raped and the man married her, then he would not be charged with anything and he would be absolved of any crime. As a parliamentary delegation from Canada, we voiced our considered disagreement with taking this piece of legislation forward. We spoke with civil society, with parliamentarians, with the media, and that piece of legislation was pulled before we left at the end of the week.

Change in legislation is absolutely necessary to see this.

I'm very pleased to see that Malawi has recently introduced a piece of legislation that will not permit a girl under the age of 18 to be married. I think that these are some of the issues that are going to address this problem with early and forced marriage. I reflect that it was not that long ago in Canada that our government raised the age of consent from 14 to 16, because we believed that, too, was something that was going to protect girls here in Canada.

I wonder if we could take a look at one issue that was not discussed on which you may have some reflections. We've put \$3.5 billion on the table for carrying forward on maternal, newborn, and child health for the post-2015 millennium development goals. One of the areas that we feel is critical is the whole issue of vital statistics and civil registration. There are probably over 200 million children that have been born and we have no record. You can't manage what you can't count.

Can you talk about the importance of how we protect children through this initiative?

• (1200)

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Paul Dewar):** Is your question for Ms. Stewart?

**Ms. Lois Brown:** Either can comment, but Ms. Stewart, if you'd like to go ahead.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Paul Dewar):** Ms. Stewart, if you would like to start.

**Ms. Dianne Stewart:** Thank you for your intervention. I couldn't agree more.

I'll start off by saying that one of our key modes of intervention, especially for the most marginalized girls, is actually to work with men and boys, and to work with what is often male customary and traditional leadership at the village level, because they are the key game changers in terms of changing attitudes and changing practices. You can have the law on the books, but if local leadership and local government is not going to enforce it, you can't get anywhere. I completely agree with that.

One key aspect of our intervention is mapping and data, understanding where these young girls are, the girls who are at most at risk. You're so right: you cannot protect those young adolescent girls if they don't exist and they're not registered anywhere.

One of our big pushes.... UNFPA is the lead agency on census. We've been making sure that gender and age desegregation is seen as a vital part of all census operations, of course, but it starts with civil registration. It's certainly a piece of the puzzle we've been working on with governments for decades, trying to ensure they have the systems to capture that information, and then to properly analyze it when they have it.

In one of our key intervention areas, for example in Zambia, which has 42% of young girls who are married before the age of 18, we've been working closely with them to map all of that existing child marriage. The basic counting piece of that is birth registration figures.

We couldn't agree more that this data foundation is vital. It's going to be a vital part of that post-2015 agenda, and I think we have to make sure that it continues. It's being well addressed at the moment, in terms of what those goals are and how the indicators will be worked out, but we cannot take our eye off the ball in ensuring that is there.

If I may add one additional thing, you talked about maternal, newborn, and child health, MNCH. I would add an "A" to MNCH, because the adolescent has particular needs. I think that as much as we know that the goals under maternal, newborn, and child health have not been reached, we have to factor in that adolescent health aspect in the post-2015 process.

Of course, knowing exactly how old a girl is when she's getting married is the first piece, and I couldn't agree more that civil registration is the first step so that you can actually track these issues for girls.

• (1205)

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Paul Dewar):** Thank you, Ms. Stewart.

Thank you, Ms. Brown.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Garneau, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Thank you both for your testimonies.

I think credit should be given to Canada and the government for some of the programs they've put in place that are aimed at protection of children and youth in developing countries. As my colleague from the NDP said, there is a full range of things that can possibly be done, and to me one that is missing is that of family planning, which I think is very important to all of this. Ms. Stewart, you seemed to corroborate that as one element that would certainly help with the challenge that faces us.

I'm trying to understand this in really practical terms. Child marriages, forced marriages, girls leaving school at a very young age, and all the things you described so well: we all agree these are things that need to be changed. In practical terms, how does one do this?

You alluded to the fact that speaking to village elders and leading members in tribal societies is one way to get the attention of those who can effect change. I'm trying to imagine this happening. When one thinks of such deeply ingrained traditions as those that you described, where an 11-year-old girl is married off, and that's effectively the end of her life except for child-bearing, it's not exactly clear to me how sitting down with those who are in a position to effect change at the village level is going to.... How does one persuade them that it is ultimately in their best interest...that it is also wrong...? How does one get that message across? How do you in the UNPF carry out that part of the task?

**Ms. Dianne Stewart:** Thank you so much for the question.

You're right: it's challenging because some of these practices are long-held. In fact, their roots are in what is obviously misguided but intended to be protection of the girl. By marrying her, somehow you're keeping her safe from other potentially worse fates.

I think one of our most powerful arguments and it works certainly with local chiefs is offering alternative routes for these girls. Obviously, this happens most often in rural areas that are impoverished. What are the opportunities for these girls to make their way out of poverty and the burden that they place on their parents, in terms of having so many children to feed? Underlying it all is the family planning issue. We'll put that aside.

Part of it is giving those girls opportunities to stay in school. It doesn't take much to convince the chiefs and the local authorities that an economically active young woman who is financially literate and literate is able to earn more money and manage her own business. Examples were given earlier of income generation and giving young women the opportunities to be part of the economic life of the village and the town. These women contribute much more to the community than they would if they got married and had five or six children. Economic arguments have been really powerful in terms of changing the trajectory for those young girls.

What we found, especially with traditional leadership, is that often when you speak to a local chief, he wants to keep his own child in school. His daughter is in high school, or probably graduating from university in the city. Often you have to appeal to their own expectations for their own daughters. This has been a great entry point with many of these fathers. When you give them opportunities for their girls to do better, there is very seldom a father who would not want to embrace that for his daughter. If they don't see those opportunities and they don't see that pathway, it's more difficult.

There are economic arguments.

Part of this is making the girls empowered enough to advocate for themselves, arming them with the right kind of arguments. Most of those girls completely understand the value of staying in school. They love being in school.

What we found in many of our adolescent girls is that holistic programming, involving their mothers as their advocates, is also a very powerful tool. We engage the mothers in many of these programs, giving them the tools they need, the arguments they need, to convince the decision-makers in the family that these girls need to stay in school.

If we think a little bit outside of the child marriage context in sub-Saharan Africa and south Asia, which is obviously where some of the biggest challenges are, we have a program in Jamaica, for example, which has a huge teenage pregnancy challenge, related both to early marriage and to unplanned teen pregnancies. What we found is that interventions that often include financial incentives to get the girls back into school have been very helpful for those girls' families. These are poor urban girls whose families don't see the advantages of an expensive education. Additional financial incentives for getting girls, who may already have had one child, back into school and preventing them from having multiple children have been very successful with very minimal interventions.

● (1210)

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Paul Dewar):** Thank you, Ms. Stewart.

**Ms. Lois Brown:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I would hate to think that anybody reading these blues might get the impression that Canada is not investing in family planning and contraception. One of the biggest projects we have with Bill and Melinda Gates is that project.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Paul Dewar):** I think you can fill us in later, but thank you for that. I don't think that was a point of order, with respect.

Thank you to our witnesses. Again, thank you for being so flexible. I know that you had to reschedule this meeting, and we appreciate it.

I also want to underline that if there are other points you wanted to make during this testimony but you forgot, feel free to send them to the clerk. It would be important for us to have them. Your interventions were very concise, and we appreciate it very much.

That's all. We'll go to vote now.









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