

## Young voices: Working Group

### Backdrop:

1. The framework of this discussion is actually 'empowerment of girls, youth and women' - To expand opportunities and freedoms for girls and boys. The issue of age of marriage is a subset. Therefore there is a need to approach the discussions with young persons and their recommendations in that frame. We must ensure that their participation informed and meaningful to them.
2. This proposed amendment will affect different age groups in two different ways.
  - a. For those in the age group of 15-18 - it pertains to how even now, with the legislation, there is rampant child marriage - directly as a result of lack other better options/opportunities; This also relates to how, right now the law criminalises rather than protect. It will also be relevant to them, post 18.
  - b. For those in the age group of 18-21, it may be all of the above - along with the question of their agency as adults.
3. Important to frame questions in a way that even peri-urban/ college going youth or those from better off families (who may not be getting married before 21 years) are able to see it as a question of autonomy and right to choice and hopefully therefore able to empathise with young people who are bearing the brunt of this and respond accordingly.
4. With those who may respond saying that 21 is better or 16/17, important understand why they feel so as often the reasons may underscore reasons like - to escape unhappiness in the natal home (due to poverty/neglect) or lack of educational opportunities/other things to do/ inevitability of marriage and the fact that a sexual relationship is only legitimised within the boundaries of marriage.
5. The intent of safe motherhood, delayed marriage of girls etc are acceptable to us - but is this the means to that end? What are the main differences between 'penal action' versus 'incentivising' later marriages? What are the elements that may constitute the 'incentivisation'?
6. Community's views are backed by community practices. Some of the community members may also be those with vested interests (like money lenders, community leaders and some religious leaders) - how does legislation of this kind relate to actually making the lives of children better?
7. Children and youngsters who have been able to negotiate for a later marriage - what has helped them to do that? What made their agency work? Is it awareness? Is it real options to move on in life? Is it sanghatan? Is it law and penal action?
8. How may a move related to increase in age of marriage be related to 'age of consent'? It is true that the age of consent is usually lower than the age of marriage in most countries. Does a move like this precede further restrictions to young people's access to knowledge, support and guidance for responsible sexuality, with restrictions on those beyond 18 - as is now being restricted to those below 18? The POCSO has many examples of brutal criminalisation on this count that we are all aware of.

9. Is gender parity only about 'age of marriage' and 'reproduction' as far as girls are concerned? Are they only a liability to be shifting hands? Where does that core lie? What do young people think?
10. Are alternatives like vocational education, safe work experiences along with opportunities to study, making institutes like NIOS effective also being considered under 'higher education' gamut? If not, most children in schools are not able to even read or write - what sense will they make of 'higher' education - if their base is not strong?
11. How is COVID determining/going to determine the situation of girls - over all - not only related to marriage and sexual abuse?
12. How to make the lives of girls secure - so that they can 'chose' a later marriage? What does this security consist of? How is it linked to the security of their families and their communities? What is the role of the governments to ensure these?
13. Which are the decision makers the youngsters are aware of - to whom they may wish to speak out to - including the Task Force - but not limited to it? Would they like to speak out to the media

Process related considerations:

- Background information to be provided to them about the Task Force; its framework and also about our Young Voices Working Group and its plans.
- Choice to work with different age cohorts separately or together – explained.
- To indicate how we may reach the young persons – through their peers, directly or through partner organisations.
- To indicate organisations/groups other than those on this core Working Group, who we are reaching out to bring them on board and to also encourage them to get in touch with the Task Force directly as well.
- Documenting the youth voices verbatim. May also need to synthesis the views for sharing – along with verbatim responses as annexures.
- How do we address the need for translations? Would we not require a document in English along with documents in the languages which young persons can use?
- To indicate the choice of means/methodologies and how they were most accessible and suitable to the concerned young persons/group.
- Ensuring consent of young persons:
  - For use of their recommendations, with their identities indicated/or concealed.
  - To be audio recorded, videographed etc. – and guidelines for their use.
- Interest and consent to take part in other meetings/discussions – with other young persons as well as adults (civil society groups and decision makers)