

The Girl Child and the
Elimination of Gender
Disparity in the 21st
Century

GOAL

- To show how discrimination against girls poses risks to their health and well being at each stage of their lives
- To identify strategies for ending neglect of the girl child

Key Terms and Definitions

- **Child:** The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) defines a child as a person under the age of 18. A girl child is thus a female younger than 18 years of age
- **Discrimination:** Treatment or consideration based on class or category rather than individual merit; partiality or prejudice.
- **Child marriage:** marriage, normally involving a minor, without the brides consent and often involving exchange of property as a requirement of marriage.

The challenge

- Gender-based discrimination and harmful traditional attitudes/practices such as female infanticide, female genital cutting, forced marriage/child brides and honor killing
- Promoting recognition of the importance and merit of motherhood and preventing denigration of mothers

Case of child marriage

- Over 51 million girls under 18 in the developing world are forced to marry, a practice widely viewed as a violation of their human rights.
- More than 100 million girls in the developing world will be married during the next 10 years.
- Although the definition of child marriage includes boys, most children married under the age of 18 years are girls.

Prevalence of child marriage

- While the practice has decreased over the last 30 years, it is common in rural areas and among the poor.
- In Southern Asia, 48%—nearly 10 million—of girls are married before the age of 18.
- In Africa, 42% of girls marry before age 18.
- In Latin America and the Caribbean, 29% of girls are married by age 18.

Child Marriage Around the World

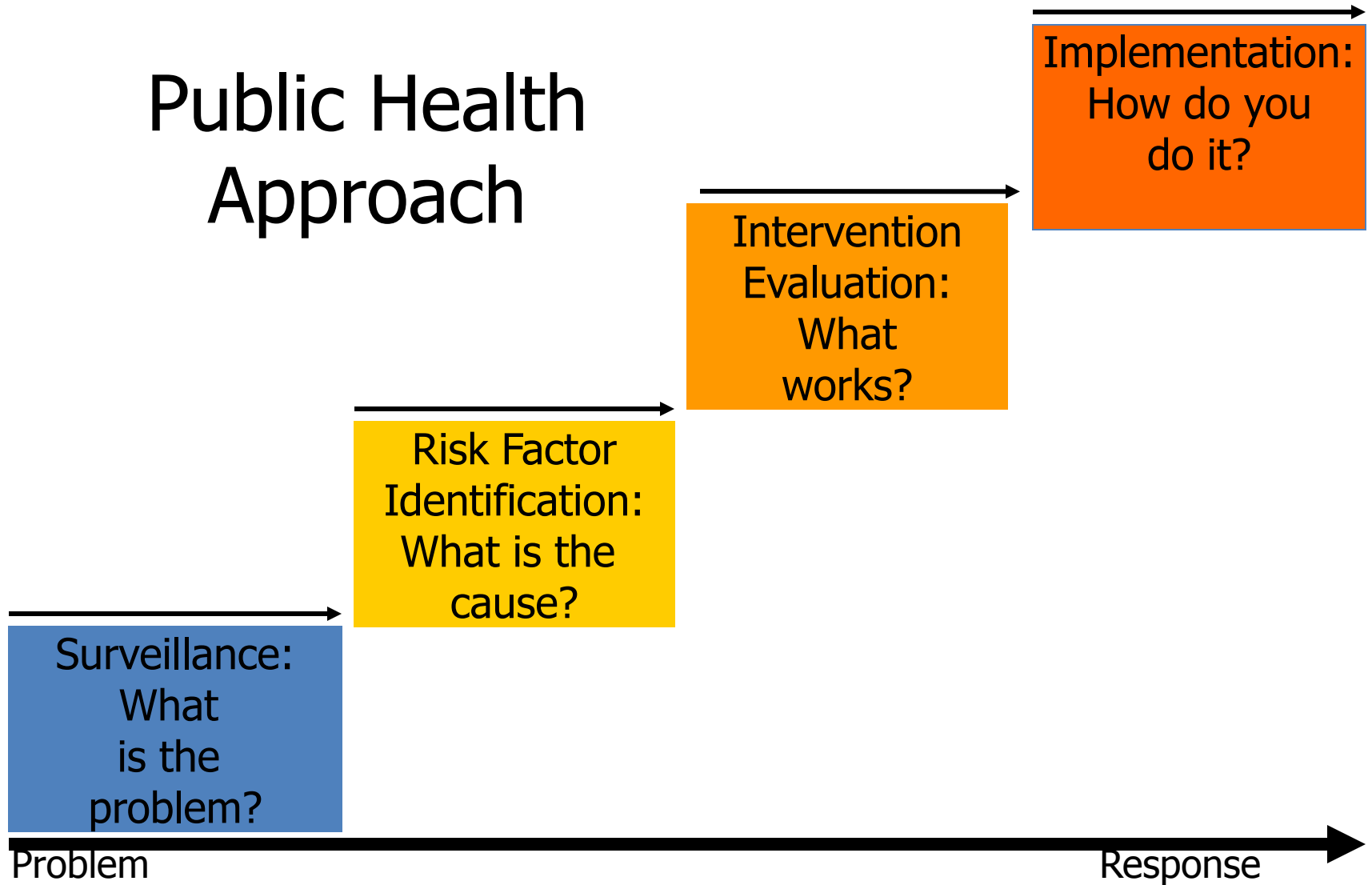
Percentage of girls marrying before the age of 18 (Top 20)

Niger	76.6	India	50.0
Chad	71.5	Ethiopia	49.1
Bangladesh	68.7	Liberia	48.4
Mali	65.4	Yemen	48.4
Guinea	64.5	Cameroon	47.2
Central African Republic	57.0	Eritrea	47.0
Nepal	56.1	Malawi	46.9
Mozambique	55.9	Nicaragua	43.3
Uganda	54.1	Nigeria	43.3
Burkina Faso	51.9	Zambia	42.1

Why end child marriage?

- “Girls who marry as children are often more susceptible to the health risks associated with early sexual initiation and childbearing, including HIV and obstetric fistula. Lacking status and power, these girls are often subjected to domestic violence, sexual abuse and social isolation. And early marriage almost always deprives girls of their education or meaningful work, which contributes to persistent poverty.” (ICRW, 2007)

Public Health Approach



Public Health Surveillance

Systematic, ongoing

- **Collection**
- **Analysis**
- **Interpretation**
- **Dissemination**
- **Link to public health practice**

Possible actions by state parties

- Leadership for ensuring gender equity
- Facilitating girls access to:
 - adequate food,
 - health care, and
 - education
- Guaranteeing that girls have every opportunity to develop their capabilities

Actions ctnd

- Attain the Beijing Platform and the recommendations of the commission on the status of women
- Protect, promote and fulfill Article 1 of universal declaration of human rights (all human beings are born free and equal...)
- Invest in women and girls

Girls education as a solution

- Girls' education is a potential solution to health problems such as:
 - Early marriage (this will need policy and culture change)
 - HIV/AIDS,
 - Maternal and child mortality, etc.
- National governments should champion girls' education as a strategic investment for progress.

Enhancing the role of girls and women as change agents

- Mothers have potential to:
 - be the primary agents for empowering individuals to transform society.
 - Inculcate their children the self-esteem and respect for others essential for the advancement of civilization.

Resources

- CNN (2009, April 14). UNICEF 'deeply concerned' about marriage of 8-year-old. Online at <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/04/14/saudi.child.marriage/index.html>
- Heidemann, Gretchen, & Ferguson, Kristin M. (2009). The Girl Child: A Review of the Empirical Literature. *Affilia*, 24, 165-185.
- International Center for Research on Women <http://www.icrw.org/>