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[Date]

Essay

***Introduction***

Early child marriage has become a global issue and is especially widespread in Cameroon. Particularly, early child marriage is prevalent in the north of the country. It has become a kind of violence against women and girls. Early child marriages are harming young girls mentally and physically and at the same time, this practice is affecting sexual, reproductive, and psychological wellbeing of young girls. In early marriage, both partners could be of same age but mostly this type of marriages take place between an older partner and an underage girl. In Cameroon, the legal age of marriage is 15 for girls and 18 for boys. It has been analyzed that there are various causes why girls in Cameroon are bound in forced marriages at a tender age. Gender inequality, belief of girls being inferior to boys, poverty, traditional perspectives and mindset of people are the main driving forces that give lifetime torture to young children in Cameroon. Power imbalance, lack of awareness and traditional attitudes in Cameroon are decisive elements that push young children (especially girls) towards marriage. Many organizations are trying to rule out this monopoly of ancient traditions in which girls are being looked upon as feeble individuals who are meant for marriage since birth.

***Discussion***

Early child marriage has become a hot issue; especially in countries like Cameroon that appeal to many national and international organizations for coming on the front foot to fight against this unjust practice. It has been analyzed that many feminist associations are making people aware by running campaigns so that they could help young children (specifically girls) who are falling a victim of this unethical practice. This fact cannot be denied that without the help of political and government assistance, it’s hard to combat this issue of early child marriage. Though many solutions have been provided and one of the most important solutions is legal handling. Cameroon is committed to eliminate early marriage by 2030. Legal resolutions and bills are presented so that this issue could be brought in limelight. Cameroon is trying to ratify the African Charter on Human, People's Rights and welfare of the child including Article 21 regarding child marriage prohibition. Every solution comes with some pros and cons, likewise, this legal solution has positive as well as negative points. Legal ratification cannot be challenged so it paves the way for Cameroon for making it free from early child marriage for long terms. Legal bills and resolutions would bind people to follow them without any opposition. Legal protection gives self-confidence to girls and all those who are against early child marriage. On the other hand, it is a fact that legal enactments take long for implementation. Lack of political will for legal ratification has been observed as an obstacle.

Second solution for eliminating early child marriage is that there is a need to break the monopoly of traditional and cultural norms that encourages forced and early child marriages. Traditional and cultural norms could be witnessed as the main driver force behind early child marriage. There is a need to change perception of society as girls were looked upon as fragile and infertile individuals. Many organizations are trying to change the mindset of society. Social awareness and mobilization of families and communities could be looked upon as the second important solution for which many feminist associations and organizations are trying to educate the parents. Traditional and societal norms should be forgotten that force girls in their early life to get married by using so called logics. Widening of the views regarding early child marriage would help in decreasing number of early child marriages. This solution could be implemented in short time and would prove as one of the lasting solutions. Positive change in the traditional system of early child marriage could prove as most effective solution for years. It is hard to take people back from their track specially which they have been following for years. Encouraging people to deviation from their traditional path may pose many challenges for those who wanted to bring a positive change in society. Another factor that has been observed is, the expectations of girls may become so high that they start forgetting to compromise on things that were considered compulsory for them in the past.

The third solution that could be looked upon for reducing the number of early child marriages in Cameroon is empowering the females. Youngsters especially girls must be educated and skilled as they are often seen as economic burden. Low self-esteem is the greatest risk of early child marriage. Empowering girls would provide them confidence. It would not only change the lives of girls but the whole society could be reformed. They could be made a useful member of society and through empowerment programs, girls could be provided a social identity in Cameroonian society. Though there are innumerable positive sides of empowering girls, but at the same time, many negative factors are also attached with this solution, such as need of sincere support from parents' side that is hard to achieve. This solution may lack political and legal support as girl empowerment clashes with traditional and cultural norms of Cameroon.

Legal ratifications, change of ancient traditional and cultural norms and empowering girls all are practical and effective solutions that could be used for eliminating the issue of early child marriage in Cameroon (Marcos Delprato et al.). Each of the presented solutions may seem better than others because of certain supporting factors. It could be seen that legal amendments and ratifications of certain articles may strongly support the idea of eliminating this issue of early child marriage. It is better than the other two solutions because it would be implemented uniformly so every individual would be following it. It would be difficult to disobey laws and doing things against legal statements as there would be some consequences as well that the violators would face. Protection provided by the government seems to be the strongest of all.

Changing traditional and cultural mindset seems to be the best solution among all; it would serve as lasting change if brought. Though changing of social attitudes of people is a tough task but once it’s done, it serves as the most beneficial solution of all. It assures protection for centuries as legal ratifications could be challenged and changed but breaking of unjust social practices and replacing them with favorable ones would last for years. Breaking of traditional and cultural practices harms not only future victims of early marriage but all cast equal damaging effects on the society as a whole (Becke et al, pp. 200-219). This solution is better than the other two because if once the girls are being given this message by the society that they are not an economic burden and are not at all inferior to boys, their self-esteem could be protected.

Empowering girls appeal most to the feminist associations as they are trying all their resources for protecting and assuring them of a great future. Empowering programs makes girls skillful that would remain with them forever. Skills enable them to rely on their own and change the traditional perception about them. Empowering girls could be considered a better solution than the rest other two as these two provide the legal and social security only but empowering programs would raise their self-confidence and they won’t be considered a burden on society, this satisfaction is missing in other two solutions (Mutyaba et al, pp. 339–355). Empowerment solution also beats the other two as by empowering girls with education, skills, and exposure they would be defining their ways that would make them a useful part of the society. Making girls a useful part of society would help Cameroon in excelling others countries. If early child marriage would be discouraged and girls would be skilled they would be able to contribute to their society effectively and as a whole, a positive role would be performed by girls (Bangha et al, pp. 1-18). Females if skilled and then married at an appropriate age, they could play a constructive role in child-rearing and as a whole society could be reformed as Napoleon said, **“**Give me good mothers and I shall give you a great nation!” According to Universal Periodic Review, Cameroon agreed to intensify awareness campaigns for families, local authorities, religious and traditional leaders to effectively fight against early child marriage.

***Conclusion***

Taking a look at the above discussion, it has been analyzed that early child marriage is still prevailing in most of the countries and Cameroon is one of them. Early child marriage should be eliminated from Cameroon by finding possible solutions. Legal and social solutions are being offered by organizations and legal authorities so that this issue of early marriage could be eliminated and girls could be provided with a sense that they are also an important part of the society and are no more an economic burden on their families. So as a whole, it could be concluded that creating awareness among families, authorities, and communities of Cameroon is essential for coping with this issue of early marriage.

Work Cited

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