

# REDUCING EARLY MARRIAGE IN YEMEN

## Yemen Country Context

- Population - 18.5 million
- 50% population under 15 years
- 76% people live in rural areas
- Rapid population growth (3.5%)
- High poverty level - 42%
- Poor access to basic services - 55% population
- Wide gender inequalities

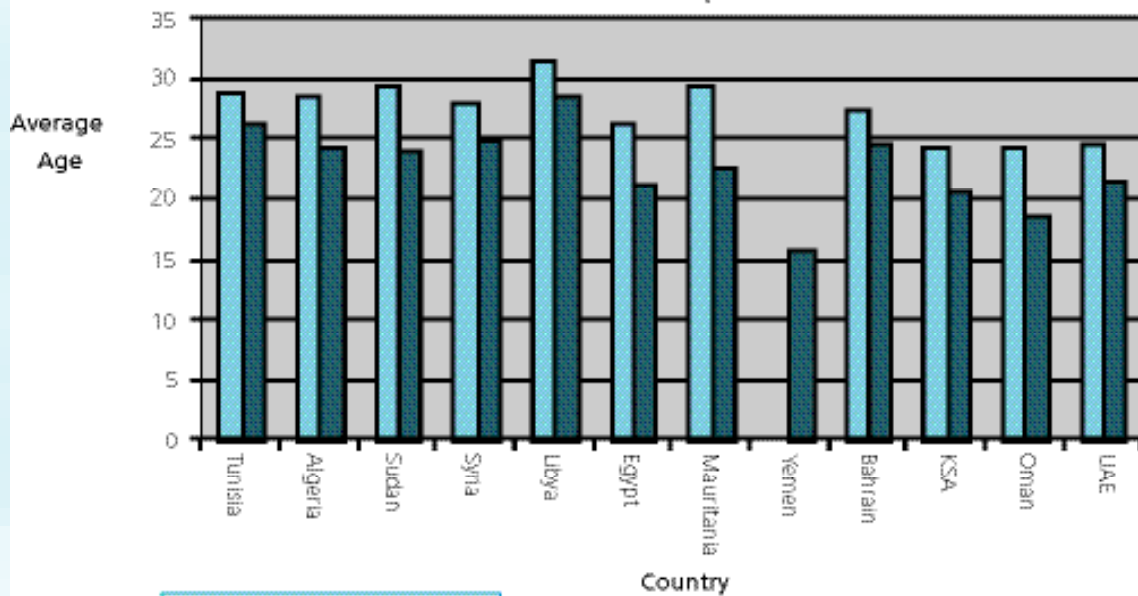
Presentation by Oxfam at the MENA Conference on Reaching Vulnerable Children and Youth, June 2004

## Development Challenges

- High female illiteracy - 73%
- High maternal mortality-350 to 1400 per 100,000
- Very high fertility rates - (average 7 children)
- Women's participation in labor market very low and mostly in informal sector
- Poor participation of women in decision making - in private and public spheres

### Did you know - age of marriage in the Arab region

Average Age of the First Marriage in Rural Areas  
Arab Countries Comparison



Yemen ranks the highest in the Arab world with the lowest age of marriage at 16 years

### **Oxfam's Programs in Yemen**

- Promoting Gender Equality
- Ending Violence against Women
- Campaigning against Early Marriage
- Strengthening civil society capacity and role in Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS)
- Gender Mainstreaming the PRS implementation and monitoring
- Health Financing and Right to quality and affordable primary health care by communities

### **What is the likely impact of Early Marriage**

- Health consequences especially for young girls and their off-springs
- Affects educational attainment especially for girls
- Contributes to gender based violence
- Psycho-social implications
- Family disintegration - increased polygamy, and divorce
- Feminization of poverty
- Early marriage has development implications and is a manifestation of gender inequality and human rights violation

### **Oxfam's Approach and Target Groups**

- Adopt a rights based approach
- Change ideas and beliefs, policy and practices of institutions on poverty and gender inequality
- Work at different levels - local, national and global
- Work in partnership with civil society and government
- Program approach includes lobbying and advocacy, capacity building, service provision, networking, public education and campaigning, research and documentation
- Target groups include poor women and men, boys and girls

### **Development of the Campaign to reduce Early Marriage in Yemen**

- The campaign will create awareness to bring about change in ideas and practices on early marriage as well as advocate for legislation on the minimum age of marriage
- The campaign will be led by Oxfam partners from civil society and the Women's National Committee, the national machinery, and allies with support from Oxfam and others

### **Issues of Early Marriage in Yemen**

- Early marriage is an issue emerged from partners' work on ground
- 24% girls and 5% boys in Yemeni society get married between the age of 15 - 19 years
- Early marriage as a phenomena is prevalent in rural and urban areas and cuts across class
- No law in Yemen on the age of marriage
- Yemen signatory to international conventions like CEDAW and CRC

### **Elements of Campaign Development**

- Research
- Building Alliances
- Developing the Campaign Strategy
- Identification of target groups - the youth and other target audiences and developing messages for them
- Media and Communication Strategy Development
- The Campaign launch and its follow up
- Developing monitoring indicators for assessing changes in ideas and practices and policy on Early marriage

### **Why are girls married young?**

- Poverty and economics
- Desire to protect young girls and boys
- Culture and traditions
- Social pressures
- No livelihood options
- Absence of legislation for minimum age of marriage
- Lack of awareness of the consequences

### **What is the research telling us and Follow Up Actions**

- Three desk researches have been carried out to date
- The researches have provided a deeper understanding of the issue from development and religious perspectives
- Inform and provide leads to primary research planned
- Helped map out the likely prevalence of early marriage in the 20 governorates of Yemen based on a set of criteria - health, education and livelihood related
- This is work in progress leading to the campaign development