



POLICY PAPER

# Realizing the African Union Campaign to End Child Marriage: Emerging Lessons from Child Marriage Programming in Malawi and Zambia



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Liaison to AU and UNECA

UN Women

Addis Ababa, October 2020

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# ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| <b>ADVANCE</b>  | Agriculture Development Through Value Chain Enhancement (Zambia)                       |
| <b>AIDS</b>     | Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome  |
| <b>AU</b>       | African Union  |
| <b>CEDAW</b>    | Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women             |
| <b>CM</b>       | Child Marriage   |
| <b>CSO</b>      | Civil Society Organization   |
| <b>ECOWAS</b>   | Economic Community of West African States  |
| <b>FGM/C</b>    | Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting  |
| <b>GBV</b>      | Gender-based Violence  |
| <b>HIV</b>      | Human Immunodeficiency Virus   |
| <b>IBSA</b>     | India, Brazil and South Africa Facility for Poverty and Hunger Alleviation (IBSA Fund) |
| <b>ICPD</b>     | International Conference on Population and Development                                 |
| <b>IEC</b>      | Information, Education and Communication   |
| <b>MAGGA</b>    | Malawi Girl Guides Association   |
| <b>MMR</b>      | Maternal Mortality   |
| <b>MoGCDSW</b>  | Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare (Malawi)                   |
| <b>NGO</b>      | Non-governmental Organization  |
| <b>REC</b>      | Regional Economic Community  |
| <b>SADC</b>     | Southern African Development Community   |
| <b>SDG</b>      | Sustainable Development Goal   |
| <b>SI</b>       | Spotlight Initiative   |
| <b>UN</b>       | United Nations   |
| <b>UN Women</b> | United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women                 |
| <b>VAWG</b>     | Violence against Women and Girls   |
| <b>WEP</b>      | Women Empowerment Principles   |

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# FOREWORD

Child marriage is a violence against girls and a human rights violation compromising the right of girls' sexual and reproductive health, right to education, bodily integrity, and autonomy over their body. Child Marriage is prevalent in Africa, if the current trend continues in the continent, there will be 250 million child brides by 2030. Gender inequality is the cause and consequence of child marriage. Thus, in African Union (AU) even having Member States with laws prohibiting child marriage, traditional patriarchal norms that perceive women's main role as child bearer hinder their implementation.

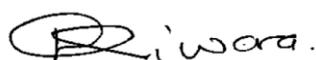
UN Women works with Member States and the AU to empower women, address gender inequality and violence against women including child marriage and harmful practices. UN Women efforts aim to contribute to the implementation of the African Union Campaign to End Child Marriage in Africa (ECM Campaign), to enhance continental awareness of the effects of child marriage and the implementation of related AU policy and legal instruments. As part of the multi-stakeholder effort, UN Women forged collaborations with the African Union Commission (AUC) Department of Social Affairs and the Women, Gender and Development Directorate (WGDD) as well as the UN system, regional and international organisations to support the roll out of the campaign and other continental commitments, as a step towards the realization of the rights of women and girls in Africa through an end to all forms of violence.

In this regard, UN Women is proud to have partnered with the India, Brazil and South Africa Facility for Poverty and Hunger Alleviation (IBSA Fund) to implement a multi-country end child marriage pilot project involving the governments of Malawi and Zambia, the two continental champion countries and other stakeholders at national and community levels. The project builds on the demonstrable progress made to address the prevailing high rates of child marriage through scholarship schemes, social mobilization actions and provision of services as part of the prevention and response efforts. At the continental level, through the AU regional component, the project supported continental policy development and knowledge management initiatives to promote an end to child marriage during 2019-2020.

In this regard, as a contribution to the implementation of the AU Five Year Strategic Plan on Ending Child Marriage (2019 – 2023), UN Women Ethiopia Office through its Liaison to the AU and UNECA has been supporting the generation of cutting edge researches that aim to provide the evidence for gender and human rights responsive policies, programmes and initiatives at different levels in Africa. This policy paper is a practical example of UN Women's contribution drawing on the lessons learned from the implementation of end child marriage projects in Malawi and Zambia to promote sharing of experiences among AU Member States in a bid to strengthen South-South learning for accelerated actions across the continent.

The key findings will be instructive to existing and future interventions in the two countries and beyond. Drawing on specific project implementation experiences, the study proposes relevant recommendations for Member States, UN System, CSOs and other actors. This research piece is also timely as it recognizes the need for deliberate actions to ensure that COVID-19 does not reverse the gains made and exacerbate the already fragile state of child marriage across Africa.

We are immensely pleased to present this research and call upon stakeholders to join UN Women and other key actors in stepping up efforts to end child marriage and all forms of violence against women and girls in Africa.



Letty Chiwara

Representative to Ethiopia, AU and UNECA

# I. INTRODUCTION

## The Story

Across Africa, 125 million girls and women alive today were married before their 18th birthday; with one in three young women in Africa married in childhood, and one in ten before their 15th birthday.<sup>1</sup> The earlier a girl marries, the larger the negative impact tends to be. In Africa each year, early marriage reduces the probability of literacy by 5.6 percentage points, and the probability of secondary school completion by 6.5 percentage points. It also contributes to maternal mortality (MMR)<sup>2</sup>. Child marriage constitutes multiple layers of child abuse, exploitation and rights violations<sup>3</sup>. Girls who are married as children are more likely to be out of school, suffer domestic violence and sexual violence, contract HIV/AIDS and die from complications during pregnancy and childbirth.<sup>4</sup> Child marriage has lasting negative impact on families, communities and economies and perpetuates inter-generational poverty.”<sup>5</sup>

One of the main challenges in ending child marriage is traditional and discriminatory norms and attitudes that make the practice accepted across the society. Poverty or lack of opportunity for waged employment is another major contributor behind child marriage. Often, in rural areas, very young girls will be married off to improve a family’s economic situation. For example, communities in the northern Malawi practice the so-called kupimbira (giving a young daughter in

marriage as repayment for a debt)<sup>6</sup>. Structural barriers continue to push vulnerable girls into child marriage and prevent them from accessing essential services once married. These barriers cut across education, health, justice and child protection systems. Within the education systems, lack of access to secondary schools, inadequate means of managing menstruation, lack of sex segregated toilets and the costs of education are major barriers. The health implications are that adolescent early pregnancies have major health consequences. Adolescent mothers aged 10–19 years face higher risks of eclampsia, puerperal endometritis and systemic infections than women aged 20–24 years.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, adolescents aged 15 through 19 are twice as likely to die during pregnancy or child birth as those over age 20; girls under age 15 are five times more likely to die.

## Global and Regional Commitments and Opportunities

Several global and international frameworks have been adopted to end child marriage and harmful practices. These include the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; and the UN’s 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action. The UN’s Sustainable Development Goals 5.3 calls for the elimination of all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation. Both Malawi and Zambia have acceded to these frameworks.

The AU has led the continental efforts to end child marriage and FGM/C and has developed various normative frameworks for the elimination of child marriage and FGM/C in Africa. Regional and sub-regional bodies have also developed complementary normative frameworks. Examples include: The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (article 21); The

1 UN Women 2019, Eliminating Child Marriages in Malawi and Zambia and Offering Scholarships to Child Marriage Survivors, – pilot project. Project duration: 1 year (From April 2019).

2 Ibid.

3 African Union (2019) Five- Year Strategic Plan on Ending Child Marriage (2019 – 2023). The AU 5- Year Strategic Plan (2019-2023) to End Child Marriage in Africa, which aims to put in place a comprehensive, coordinated and mutually reinforcing set of activities to galvanize and accelerate actions by member states, partners and communities to end child marriage. It seeks among others to enhance continental awareness of the drivers and implications of child marriage, mobilize key stakeholders, partners and communities, and catalyze policy, programmatic and advocacy actions in addressing negative social norms, gender inequality, promotion and protection of child rights and prevention of child marriage.

4 Ibid.

5 Source: <http://blogs.worldbank.org/education/rippling-economic-impacts-child-marriage> (accessed on 2nd September 2020).

6 Human Rights Watch, (2014) I’ve never experienced happiness: Child marriage in Malawi. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/03/06/ive-never-experienced-happiness/child-marriage-malawi> (accessed on 2nd September 2020)

7 <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-pregnancy>

Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (article 6); The African Youth Charter (article 8); The SADC Protocol on Gender and Development (article 8); The SADC Model Law on Eradicating Child Marriage and Protecting Children Already in Marriage (2016); and the ECOWAS Strategic Framework for Strengthening National Child Protection Systems. Despite progressive policy commitments and institutional frameworks, much needs to be done to realize the goals.

In an effort to improve the lives of millions of girls and foster implementation of these frameworks, the African Union (AU) launched its first continental Campaign to End Child Marriage in Africa on 29 May 2014 during the 4<sup>th</sup> AU Conference of Ministers of Social Development. The campaign's duration has been extended to 2023.<sup>8</sup> Through the launch of national campaigns, the AU seeks to reinforce existing political commitments promoting the equality and protection of women and girls through strategic regional level partnerships constituting CSOs, UN agencies,<sup>9</sup> International NGOs, Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and development partners. The AU commitment has embedded stronger monitoring and evaluation component to measure the impact of the regional advocacy, ensure the enhanced engagement of survivors of child marriage in policy development and planning processes as well as the systematic documentation and promotion of promising practices and success stories on ending child marriage in Africa.

The AU Campaign to End Child Marriage in Africa during its 5-year implementation has made notable gains in advancing an end to child marriage on the continent, from enhancing the normative framework to harnessing the political commitment of several AU Member States. The campaign has the good will and enthusiasm of national, regional and global partners and donors, and has garnered a renewed determination to results on the ground, where efforts need to be stepped up to catalyze positive changes in the lives of young girls.

In 2015, the Heads of State and Governments of the African Union formally adopted an African Common

Position on the AU Campaign to End Child Marriage in Africa (the AU Common Position). The AU Common Position urges all Member States, among other things, to (i) develop national strategies and action plans aimed at ending child marriage; (ii) enact and implement laws that set the legal minimum age for marriage at 18 years of age or above, with no exceptions and applicable under all legal systems; and (iii) implement all continental policies and legal instruments relating to human rights, gender equality, maternal and child health, and harmful traditional practices for the empowerment and participation of girls and women in development.

### National Legislative and Policy Context: Malawi and Zambia

Malawi and Zambia<sup>10</sup> have the highest rates of Child marriages. However, the governments of Malawi and Zambia have been leading champions at the continental and the global levels in the effort to eradicate child marriage, with demonstrable progress at the national and the community levels. The President of the Republic of Zambia, His Excellency President Edgar Lungu, in his capacity as the AU Presidential Champion on ending child marriage also hosted in November 2015, the First Africa Girls Summit in Lusaka, Zambia. Both countries have launched campaign and national strategies to end child marriage, led legal reform processes, and co-convened dialogue platforms at AU Summits and at the United Nations General Assembly sessions through their Heads of State, signaling that political will at the highest levels is critical for achievement of the SDGs, specifically SDG 5 and galvanizing multi-sectoral interventions.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> African Union (2019) *Five-Year Strategic Plan on Ending Child Marriage (2019 – 2023)*.

<sup>9</sup> UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage 2016–2019, the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint program on FGM and the Spotlight Regional Program on Ending Child Marriage and FGM.

<sup>10</sup> In Zambia 31% of women aged 20–24 years married by the age of 18. In Malawi approximately 1 in 2 girls are married by the age of 18. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (June 2016) *State of the World's Children: A Fair Chance for every Child*, UNICEF [https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/UNICEF\\_SOWC\\_2016.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/UNICEF_SOWC_2016.pdf) Accessed September 2020

<sup>11</sup> UN Women (2019), *Eliminating Child Marriages in Malawi and Zambia and Offering Scholarships to Child Marriage Survivors*, – IBSA Funded pilot project.

## BOX 1

### Legislative and Policy context

#### Malawi:

The Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations Act (2015) sets the minimum age of marriage at 18 for both boys and girls without parental consent. This law recognizes all marriages including civil, religious and customary and marriage by repute or permanent cohabitation. In 2017, Malawi's parliament amended the Constitution by removing the provision that allowed children between the ages of 15 and 18 to marry with parental consent. This was a significant milestone as it aligned the Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations Act with the Constitution. The Constitutional amendment was spurred through engagement and advocacy of young people and received high level support from the President and First Lady of Malawi. Local chiefs have also annulled child marriages at the district level. Although statutory law has the capacity to invalidate and declare as illegal any other law that is harmful, weak implementation, enforcement and monitoring of existing legal provisions at grassroots levels allows for harmful customary, religious or social practices to continue without legal ramifications. In addition, community by-laws and informal courts are not aligned with statutory law, yet are widely used in rural areas.

Malawi has a National Strategy on Ending Child Marriage (2018-2023) that is led by the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare (MoGCDSW). The strategy aims to reduce the prevalence child marriage in Malawi by 20% by 2023. A multi-sectoral approach is used that seeks to empower girls through increased economic opportunities, school re-entry, to reduce the dropout rate and keep them in school through to secondary school level. It further aims to build the capacity of law enforcement agencies, increasing the number of child protection services such as victim support groups, frontline child protection workers and Children's Corners etc. and encourages community dialogues. The strategy focuses on making available age-appropriate SRHR information and services for young girls and adequate healthcare and psychosocial support for CM survivors.

#### Zambia:

a dual legal system that recognizes both customary and statutory law is in use. Although the Marriage Act (1964) establishes that the legal age of marriage is 21 and that parental consent is allowed for those 16 years and above, these provisions are not applied in customary law (that is commonly used in rural areas) where children can marry from the age of puberty. According to Article 266 of the Constitution a child is defined as a person who has attained or is below the age of 18 years, whilst an adult is a person who has attained or is above the age of 19 years. There is no explicit statement on the minimum legal age for marriage and in most cases customary law is usually upheld by the courts unless it violates the Constitution or statutory law. A Marriage Bill (2015) covering various forms of marriage including civil, religious and customary marriages was prepared but has yet to be passed.

Zambia has a National Strategy on Ending Child Marriage (2016-2021) with a goal to reduce child marriages by 40% by 2021 using multi-sectoral approach. Implementation of this strategy is led by a National Coordination Unit at the Ministry of Gender with a secretariat of 11 ministries where they will monitor progress on a regular basis. The country also has a National Advocacy and Communication Strategy on Ending Child Marriage in Zambia (2018-2021) that was developed to enhance implementation of the National Strategy to Ending Child Marriage. The main aim is "to facilitate positive change in prevailing attitudes, behaviours, beliefs and practices that contribute to the practice of child marriage"; Advocacy activities will be delivered through six strategic approaches: 1) Capacity Strengthening of youth, parents, and community members; 2) Media Engagement; 3) Social Mobilization, including role models; 4) Community Engagement with traditional and religious leaders and councils, and participation of young people; 5) Advocacy, including national, provincial, district and community activities targeting leaders, organizations, and decision makers. 6) Establishing coordinating mechanisms for the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of advocacy and communication activities.

## II. THE INTERVENTIONS

The Governments of Malawi and Zambia have made commitments to end child marriage. With a focus on education, interventions to ensure law reform and address negative social norms have been implemented towards ending child marriage and the promotion of the human rights of child marriage survivors. Ending child marriage would have a large positive effect on education for girls and their children. Furthermore, it would increase the expected earnings and household welfare of women. Evidence from Zambia is clear:

*Families where child marriage did not take place, the factors that prevent and delay child marriage included: education level of parents, access and availability of quality education, strong community leadership, involvement in income generating activities, presence of role models, knowledge/understanding of issues related to sexual and reproductive health, safe and respected opportunities for personal development and recreation and order in the family: family harmony and intra-family dialogue on sensitive issues.<sup>12</sup>*

Given this background, evidence and the support of the India, Brazil and South Africa Facility for Poverty and Hunger Alleviation (IBSA fund),<sup>13</sup> UN WOMEN<sup>14</sup> in partnership with the AU, UN agencies, Government line Ministries, and CSOs; has collaborated with traditional/religious leaders, Media institutions, and child marriage survivors towards the overall outcome of reduced child marriages in Malawi and Zambia. By adopting a multi-pronged approach, UN Women works towards bringing catalytic change in the lives of girls through technical assistance to key stakeholders, advocacy and social mobilization to address negative social norms as well as ensure improved access to second chance education. The approach is guided by three broad change strategies designed to implement the pilot and reach communities and child marriage survivors:

| OUTCOMES   |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An enabling legislative and policy environment that promotes access to education by child marriage survivors and those at risk of child marriage improved;</li> <li>• Favorable social norms, attitudes and behaviors towards investing in child marriage survivor's education and children's rights to prevent VAWG adopted;</li> <li>• Access to quality essential services for child marriage survivors expanded.</li> <li>• South-south learning through knowledge sharing on ending child marriage and second chance education.</li> </ul>   |  |   |
| OBJECTIVES   |  |   |
| Capacity Strengthening   | Technical Assistance   | Social Mobilisation   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institutions to implement legislation on ending child marriages and school re-entry policies;</li> <li>• Civic and formal institutions that advocate for the prevention of early marriage;</li> <li>• Child marriage survivors to enhance their understanding and ability to exercise their rights to quality essential services and articulate rights for girls;</li> <li>• Service providers to deliver quality coordinated essential services for child marriage survivors.</li> <li>• Utilization of mentorships to champion respectful relationships, ending child marriage and gender equality at individual and community levels.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop tools/guidelines to improve quality, expanded access and use of referral pathways of essential services for child marriage survivors;</li> <li>• Develop a screening to facilitate selection process for offering scholarships to child married survivors;</li> <li>• Develop and integrate programs addressing early child marriages; gender-based violence (GBV) into formal and non-formal education.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raise awareness and learning on addressing child marriage and gender based violence at community level;</li> <li>• Built ownership for project districts to spearhead and coordinate interventions and facilitate identification of the child marriage survivors;</li> <li>• Address negative social norms to end child marriage and promote gender equality by engaging traditional and community leaders;</li> <li>• Strengthen mechanisms for accountability in addressing child marriage.</li> </ul> |

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Source: UN Women. The IBSA Project entitled Eliminating Child Marriages in Malawi and Zambia and Offering Scholarships to Child Marriage Survivors "is funded by the India, Brazil and South Africa Facility for Poverty and Hunger Alleviation through the UN South-South Cooperation (UNSSC). Among the expected outcomes of the project, the two are; for the Governments of Malawi and Zambia to enforce the national legislation to eradicate child marriages at national and local level and to reposition the outcomes from the project into strategic communication, convening and documentation to share best practice through the African Union for making this a regional approach".

<sup>14</sup> UN Women is the United Nations entity dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, UN Women was established to accelerate progress on meeting their needs worldwide.

### III. WHAT ARE WE LEARNING?

Transforming the lives of parents, guardians and girls to be self-sustaining via empowerment addresses the drivers of child marriage and improves the health and well-being of girls and child marriage survivors.

#### **The IBSA scholarship is changing the discourse of vulnerability of girls:**

The dominant social norm is that girls are a burden to families, lack agency and are dependent. The IBSA funded pilot project's provision of scholarships targeting girls who are survivors of child marriage challenges this discourse of vulnerability eliminating the excuse of removing girls from schooling due to marriage or pregnancy. The results are positive, creating excitement for both girls and women at the opportunities being widened to learn, build skills and knowledge about new possibilities. The pilot project has rapidly meeting its target of providing 1,223 scholarships and 555 bicycles to child marriage survivors to facilitate movement for those furthest from schools in Zambia and 720 scholarships and 520 bicycles to girls in Malawi. In Malawi 700 are school going girls and 20 are young women to be engaged in vocational skills development. Scholarships include school fees, provisioning of school supplies and uniforms. In Zambia scholarships extend to school shoes, books, and boarding fees. The selection processes are made transparent through engagement with district scholarship committees, traditional leaders and community stakeholders and the utilization of screening tools. These tools have been collaboratively developed with community stakeholders.

The uptake of scholarships is very successful. There is a rise in demand by girls and young women who dropped out of school due to child marriage and pregnancies to return back to school. There are requests to extend the programme to more schools and areas. Women who previously missed schooling are now seeking inclusion. Parents, guardian and girls are beginning to see how girls can educationally excel and become advocates when supported. Clearly, there is recognition of the high value of education and a desire for education in contexts where socio-economic challenges have hampered access to schooling. A good practice has been the inclusion and positioning of 6 IBSA scholarship beneficiaries at an AU regional consultative process for development of Phase 2 of the AU continental Strategic Plan to accelerate action to end child marriage (2019-2023) held in Johannesburg,

South Africa in December 2019 as partners, role models and powerful advocates. The regional participation and consultations not only strengthened the Strategic Plan with practical insights but also promoted South-South learning in AU Member States. Evidence from a child marriage survivor in Malawi is clear illuminating the possibility for increased autonomy for girls:

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*I was told that my only option to survive was to marry quickly-like my eldest siblings had done. I have seen the advantages of school and see the difference school can make in one's life. I understand many things and can communicate better than a girl who hasn't been to school can. Currently, I am saving money to start a business selling clothes. I researched and wrote a business plan so I know that my business will be successful. (Edith Juma is a survivor of early child marriages from Salima in central Malawi)*

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There has, however, been unanticipated consequences with the increased re-entry/retention of girls in schools such as crowded and inadequate facilities to cope with the rise in student populations given the scholarships. Demand for scholarship support will remain high in contexts where the girl child is a source of asset acquisition in economically neglected communities; and schools are few, at a great distance or offer inadequate provision for ensuring attendance and safety for girls. Going forward, this will call for raising community awareness of other existing girl empowerment programmes and leveraging on these efforts to expand access for girls.

#### **Community engagement enhances local ownership of child marriage interventions:**

The pilot project "Eliminating Child Marriages in Malawi and Zambia and Offering Scholarships to Child Marriage Survivors has successfully set up the groundwork for:

- Identifying the key districts<sup>15</sup> with the highest prevalence of child marriage.
- Providing understanding of the specificity of the contexts for interventions through community conversations.
- Highlighting how vital it is to engage powerful gate-keepers such as cultural and religious leaders if change is to be enabled.
- Understanding the critical importance of strengthening local level multi-sectoral platforms (described below) to facilitate participatory community conversations, community entry, and intervention planning and support.

The preliminary groundwork of interactions has created a collective agreement and awareness of the magnitude and differences in how child marriage is being practiced. It has further ensured community buy-in and brought recognition to the contextual variances in drivers of child marriage practices that calls for diverse responsive interventions to end child marriage. For example, the young women marriage survivors are in receipt of mentorship training that amplifies their voices and has led to door to door mentorship sessions of school going girls both in primary and secondary schools. Mentorship activities have further provided a fora for girls to network, become friends, sisters, and each other's defender /keeper and support towards the completion of their education.

The narrative of child marriage as primarily about adolescent single girls must now expand to encompass an understanding of girls now over 18 who want to remain in their marriages but need livelihoods, or are widowed adolescents, or have disabilities, or are now single, and/or are mothers. Moreover, there are girls choosing to marry against the wishes of their parents/guardian especially given the lack of opportunities. Additionally, there is need to consider how to include boys to strengthen favorable social norms, attitudes and behaviors towards girls.

Community conversations have highlighted these diverse experiences of vulnerability exacerbated by environmental shocks and the uncertain futures and risks to livelihood that rural communities face. These conditions intensify inequalities and threaten the rights and wellbeing of the girl child.

<sup>15</sup> Districts of Salima and Dedza in Malawi. Districts of Mpulungo and Chama in Zambia.

### **Expanding community livelihood sources contributes to the viability and sustainability of the scholarship project:**

A new challenge is the possible tensions produced for those who are not recipients of scholarships, but are needy in the rural communities being targeted. Project stakeholders will need to begin to explore methods for expanding this initial scholarship intervention by supporting asset building for both vulnerable and affected households and schools. Schools within the project are becoming the pilot test of entrepreneurial skills building and experiences. In Malawi and Zambia, the focus has been on laying the groundwork with entrepreneurship and business management skills development and capacity building aimed at project beneficiaries but currently exclude financial packages.

Towards this end, the pilot project in Zambia has begun supporting a variety of creative initiatives<sup>16</sup> linking schools and families to agricultural and entrepreneurial schemes to create livelihood opportunities and provide support for girls' education. Depending on what the families chose to invest in, the IBSA project will support entrepreneurship training, and the provision of equipment by the Ministry of Gender's ADVANCE program and Dynamic Technologies. The Ministry of Gender and Dynamic Technologies (Dytech) have both partnered with the IBSA project to ensure sustainability of the project. Emerging is the idea that schools could act as centers of learning for both those who are in school (students) and out of school (parents/guardians). However, this learning approach would require the inclusion of all schools in a district to maximize access. Furthermore, although current project selected schools are embracing entrepreneurship, their success will depend on government support with extension services, skills training support, and links to markets that calls for UN Women continued partnerships in the initial phases. Importantly these ventures will need to be low cost and self-sustaining. In some cases, these ventures will require that schools have access to sufficient land and tenure security for setting up entrepreneurial activities.

<sup>16</sup> Dytech Limited, an agribusiness company, is providing support to vulnerable groups through economic empowerment. They will be focusing on building the capacity of rural communities and schools to have sustainable incomes and access foreign markets with their goods.

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***Sustainability of the IBSA project is a major concern for both guardians and girls. If the support ends too early it may send a negative message to other girls because they will simply go back to their former lives and demonstrate there is no way out for other girls who have been married to go back to school and actually complete their education (Chama District, Zambia – Ministry of Community Development and Social Services)***

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During the project duration efforts have been made to advocate with government and other partners to adopt similar programs and approaches in promoting second chance education to promote sustainability. Other efforts on resourcing include working with other complementing projects such as the Spotlight Initiative (SI) and Women Economic Empowerment (WEP), efforts to support women through Village Savings and Loans initiatives in Malawi. In Zambia, the development of district strategies on ending child marriage will be a resource that will inform what other strategies might be used.

**The critical importance of multi-sectoral partnerships and platforms:** The pilot project has set store on leveraging existing structures at district levels and strengthening these local structures as key to ensuring the wide range of critical and interconnected responses needed to address child marriage. These responses will be inclusive of collecting needed data/information, coordinating responses and sustaining the necessary actions for addressing child marriage. The evolving multi-sectoral platforms known as District or Community Committees may include representations from Ministries of Gender, Department of Community Development, Department of Social Welfare, Health, Education, Ministry of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs, Agriculture, the Judiciary, Human Rights Commission, Gender Equity and Equality Commission, Police victim support unit, faith-based organizations and youth (young women and men). Their emerging roles under this pilot project is the recognition of the importance of health and protection services, access to skills and learning, access to resources and capacities for entrepreneurship for girls and their vulnerable families and consistent, coordinated, shared messaging to end child marriage across all sectors. Capacities, accountability and enforcement for addressing child marriage

have been lacking. The pilot project has presented an opportunity to begin addressing these gaps going forward. A multi-sectoral approach is a recognition of the power of partnerships that are critical to targeting and solving problems, creating synergies, and bringing on board diverse insights and skill sets. The development of referral pathways through a consultative process also built ownership and integration of the pathways to strengthen coordination and access to services for child marriage survivors. The current action planning by District and Community Committees is a step in the right direction towards institutionalizing their ability to respond and address child marriages. An example of good practice was illustrated by the leadership and creativity of the Chama-Muchinga Province District Committee in Zambia in creating ideas for a micro-enterprise that is encouraged by the goals of the IBSA fund and will be submitted for funding.<sup>17</sup>

**The authority of traditional and religious leadership as change agents:** Community stakeholders are the first responders to child marriage. Traditional leaders are very instrumental in challenging child marriage. The AU campaign on Ending Child Marriage highlights the importance of working with traditional and religious leaders given that tradition and religion are also the strongest enablers of child marriage.<sup>18</sup> In alignment with the AU campaign, UN Women has supported engagements with traditional and cultural institutions to enhance their understanding and capacity to address gender issues, clarifying legal challenges for vulnerable girls and women and amplifying the efforts and strategies implemented by Traditional

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<sup>17</sup> It proposes and focuses on the economic empowerment of an initial (1000) households and (5) Schools with Child Marriage Survivors with In-kind Small Livestock Passover Grants. It aims to contribute to the efforts of the IBSA Fund program.

<sup>18</sup> UN Women African Strategy and the Regional initiative support to the Council of Traditional Leaders of Africa (COTLA/CONATA) adopts a bottom up approach in addressing negative social norms and in ending child marriage by engaging traditional leaders. To this end UN Women also built strategic partnerships with AU Commission, SADC, ECOWAS, EAC, IGAD, Pan African Parliament and other regional and continental bodies and institutions; technical support to strengthen the governance and operational capacity of COTLA/CONATA; support the development of a robust monitoring and evaluation system towards a catalytic effect in ending child marriage.



Leaders to end child marriage.<sup>19</sup> For example, in Malawi as in Zambia, “to compliment Government efforts, traditional leaders in some districts developed informal social norms which are called “community by-laws” that among other things nullify child marriages and reduce the rate and numbers of school drop outs”. Such collective efforts are highly respected and provide a sense of ownership for communities. However, such efforts needed to be in alignment with Malawi’s constitution.<sup>20</sup>

**Law and Policy Reform is central to the efforts to end child marriage:** Although laws and policies addressing child marriage and school re-entry are high on the agenda for Malawi and Zambia, there is recognition that law alone or punitive responses will not sufficiently address the problem of child marriage. Social, cultural and economic impediments that sustain child marriage need to be simultaneously addressed. Further, project efforts currently underway to harmonize customs and statutory laws highlight the

19 UN Women (2018), *Traditional Leaders meet in Blantyre to address child marriage in Africa*. <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2018/10/traditional-leaders-in-malawi>

20 Government of Malawi. (2020) *Awareness Handbook on Child and Gender Related Laws, Lilongwe, Malawi*. The “Community by-law framework” deal with matters that are substantively and comprehensively provided for under various laws together with penalties in case of breach. ..., traditional leaders do not have authority and power to preside over and determine issues or matters arising out breaches of laws as is contemplated in the community by-law framework. Rather, the power and authority to adjudicate and determine disputes under the various laws is given to the courts in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution”. The Handbook will be launched in 2020.

need for consultative processes with communities that can begin to build a human rights culture, ensure that communities and individuals are made aware of their entitlements within the law and facilitate access to legal systems. Constitutional reforms must also ensure gender equality, children’s rights and the need to empower adjudicative bodies to develop customary laws in line with constitutional principles and international human rights standards. Although Zambia has a policy for school retention and re-entry for pregnant girls and Malawi has a policy for “Learner re-admission” efforts need to be directed towards strengthening awareness and capacities for the implementation of legislation on ending child marriage and school re-entry in both countries. Stumbling blocks remain in the absence of adequate resources, judicial infrastructures, legal personnel, and victim support units.

**Provision of essential services and safe spaces offer safety nets:** The need to build the social, economic and health assets of child marriage survivors enhances the availability of options and safety nets for the girls. Circumstances such as early pregnancy and poverty that lead to child marriage and the burden of marital responsibilities are usually traumatizing; impacting the psychological well-being and mental health of girls who marry early. Consequently, when child marriage survivors return to school, they are likely to face numerous psycho-social challenges that affect their performance. Recommendations called for the strengthening of services by child protection officers and community gatekeepers such as mother group members. The pilot projects accordingly has prioritized the provision of essential services to address the impact of child marriage as a threat to the safety and health of adolescent girls with varying levels of results.



## Summary of the results, challenges and lessons learned

| To improve the provision of quality essential services, the IBSA funded pilot project has:  | Successes, challenges and lessons in the delivery of essential services in Malawi/Zambia  |   |
|---|---|---|
|   | Malawi  | Zambia  |
| Facilitated the linkages to identified essential services for child marriage by first revising or developing as needed the guidelines on essential services provision for child marriage survivors; | Activity currently being finalized by the Implementing partner (Malawi Interfaith Aids Association).  | Zambia through UN Women and the Ministry of Gender has developed as needed the guidelines on essential services provision for child marriage survivors; However, these still need to be strengthened as service providers were just beginning to understand what was expected of them. If strengthening is not achieved, this good process that has started maybe lost  |
| Strengthened capacities of service providers to deliver quality, coordinated essential services for child marriage survivors ;  | Capacitating Child protection workers, Traditional and Religious leaders on registration of marriage certificates   | Strengthened capacities of service providers. But these skills need to be scaled up as a minimum number of service providers were trained both in Mpulungu (10) and Chama (11)  |
| Developed referral mechanisms and raising awareness on the referral pathways to essential services;   | Community Awareness Handbook is a key tool developed under the project to strengthen the handling and referring of cases at Traditional Authority level aligned to the provisions in the national legislation.  | Although this has been achieved, there is need to monitor how the skills are being utilized. As the activity was implemented towards the end of the pilot project, the time was insufficient to actually assess the effectiveness. Suffice to say awareness raising was achieved  |
| Supported the development of life-skills clubs for child marriage survivors in learning institutions to understand and exercise their rights to quality essential services.                         | Setting up of Girl Clubs coordinated by MAGGA has been key in the mentoring of child marriage survivors and capacitating them on different life skills to allow for completion of education. With the inclusion of role models the girls are inspired and motivated to stay out of marriages and access education | The project has successfully supported the development of life-skills clubs for child marriage survivors.   |
| Integrated health, sexual and reproductive health and legal information and services to enable ease of access and utilization of holistic services for child marriage survivors                     | Sensitization and awareness raising of legal information to community members has helped communities in addressing cases of child marriage and gender based violence taking place in the target districts.  | This was easily achieved because of the approach taken at pilot project inception. The IBSA District Multi Sectoral Committees that were formed in Chama and Mpulungu made implementation of the pilot project really easy to achieve. This is because in the committee were different institutions and organizations that brought into the team different skills. The multi-sectorial nature of the group also meant making linkages was made very easy. The school guidance and counseling teachers made it possible for child marriage survivors to be connected to sexual and reproductive health. The child marriage survivors and their families also had access to the Victim Support Unit for legal related issues. |

In both Malawi and Zambia, the introduction of the Safe space model<sup>21</sup> is a promising practice that enables technical support to mentors and facilitates mentoring and peer support for scholarship recipients, teachers and mother group members.

<sup>21</sup> Safe Space model guidelines have been developed by the Government of Malawi with support from the European Union, UNFPA and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

**Diversifying communication activities is key to greater visibility and local ownership of interventions:**

A multitude of communication approaches and products are needed given the diverse contexts, stakeholders and type of girls targeted by the IBSA fund. For example, in Zambia the project sought to refine and consolidate existing communication products developed by the Ministry of Gender. Recognizing the different categories of stakeholders ranging from: parents/guardians, community leaders, schools, policy makers and girls, has meant that communication activities, products and materials need to be designed for diverse stakeholders using multiple channels. Further, it will mean understanding modes of communication in different rural communities and who are respected messengers. A good practice example in the districts of Salima and Dedza in Malawi is the engagement, of 80 influential women as role models, such as female chiefs, spouses of Pastors and Sheikhs and traditional counselors such as Anankungwi, as change agents and leaders with opportunity to contribute to the reduction of gender-based violence.



Communication actions have ranged from activities friendly to rural communities<sup>22</sup>, participatory activities to ensure ownership, focus group discussions to understand points of influence, edutainment to broaden the appeal of the messages. However, most printed materials have been in English raising concern about their reach in rural communities beyond schools. Local radio stations have been a powerful medium for creating awareness but one day trainings for journalists will not adequately sustain awareness raising activities by the media in the absence of predictable funding to sustain capacity building activities.

22 For example, “edutainment” that includes road shows, music, and role playing that use participatory methods to educate and entertain.



**Addressing Covid-19 is key to prevent the reversal of gains made in ending child marriage:**

The COVID-19 pandemic constitutes a cause for concern. The premature closure of schools may have serious consequences for girls who had recently received scholarships but are now back at home with some at risk of marriage. There is evidence of increases in child pregnancies in project districts. The Government of Malawi through a recently released Rapid Assessment Report have reported 40,000 teenage pregnancies and 13,000 child marriages in Malawi.<sup>23</sup> Families are also not allowing youth to attend peer support groups out of fear and some services have been scaled down. These limitations threaten a reversal of the gains being made to end child marriages through the contributions of the IBSA fund. Nevertheless, the situation has opened discussions towards innovative responses such as the possibilities for provision of digital access to information. In Malawi, through a complementary project titled the “We Learn Virtual Skills School Pilot Project” targeting the same impact districts and similar beneficiaries is procuring 60 tablets to facilitate digital skills learning. Utilizing the tablets, girls will be trained in using basic digital and online skills on how to use a computer, MS Office packages, internet and email. Critically, chiefs have formally taken on the responsibility, through a declaration, to monitor and support girls during the covid-19 period while schools are monitoring girls who are recipients of the IBSA scholarships. Furthermore, in Zambia, the Ministry of Gender has taken the additional step of site visits to sustain support for the IBSA scholarship girls.

23 Ministry of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare (2020). *A Rapid Assessment Study of Teenage Pregnancies and Child Marriages during COVID 19 in Malawi*. In Chama and Mpulungu districts of Zambia, there are no reported increase in child pregnancies.

## IV. CHARTING THE WAY FORWARD

### BOX 2

#### Key Messages and Recommendations

1. There is the growing recognition that prevention of child marriage and support for the girl child will require the engagement of boys and young men. This is in line with continental frameworks on the need for fostering collaboration with men's organizations that address gender inequalities and advocate for the elimination of harmful traditional practices.
2. There is the recognition of District committees/multi-sectoral teams as key stakeholders in efforts to end child marriage and support child marriage survivors. Community stakeholders will be the first responders to child marriage. This calls for the continuous strengthening of their capacities to respond. This will be in line with AU commitments calling for "improved or enhanced engagement with grassroots or community level initiatives and organizations." Linked to this recommendation is the need for vigorous awareness raising and review of pertinent policies and laws that support child marriage survivors and ending of child marriages.
3. Given the risks and vulnerabilities faced by girls in poor rural communities, there is a need to ensure the viability and sustainability of suggested small-scale entrepreneurship programmes. An overall key recommendation is to strengthen skills, information, confidence and support for child marriage survivors, their families and schools to develop small businesses, for example, bee-keeping; as well as knowledge and understanding that can help them connect, compete and sell in export markets. Enhanced access to other empowerment programs such as ADVANCE; development of village banking activities; and capacities for market access can be supportive actions.
4. Child marriage related programs should integrate the provision of psycho-social services to child marriage survivors as part of the comprehensive response to support the safety, wellbeing and rights of the girls.
5. Future programming for SRHR services must link with VAWG and End Child Marriage programmes given the major negative health consequences of adolescent early pregnancies and childbirth.
6. There is a call by all partners to continue to showcase success stories of child marriage survivors to help delay marriage or sex, illuminate options, bring attention to emerging opportunities and highlight the increased autonomy of girls who have developed and strengthened their skills and gained greater awareness of their human rights.
7. Communication materials should be developed in local languages to ensure wider reach and accessibility. Ideally, the use of Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials with pictures of locally based opinion leaders, pupils and others such as school heads, teachers, and reformed pupils should be encouraged.
8. Partnership efforts should be aligned and synergized including through joint monitoring, reporting, documentation and learning towards tangible impact. Funding and multi-sectoral partnerships should be sustained to ensure the sustainability and continuity of ending child marriage initiatives including to strengthen legislative, policy frameworks and budgetary allocations by the government.
9. Youth engagement through inter-generational dialogues is critical to address negative social norms and promote gender equality and women's empowerment. Linked to this will be the

continuing call to enhance the voices and participation of girls and survivors in consultative processes that inform planning, policy development, implementation and monitoring.

10. Schools, traditional, faith-based and community leaders should be engaged to strengthen the oversight and monitoring mechanisms for early detection and prevention of child marriages.
11. Considering COVID-19 pandemic which has brought out a spotlight on child pregnancies and the new way of doing things, there is need to close the gender digital divide as most girls and women are not able to access information. Efforts need to start with building the capacity of women and girls so that they are not left behind on information and decisions around COVID 19 management.
12. The documentation and systematic dissemination of lessons learned from child marriage related programs is important to strengthen learning and decision-making as well as monitor progress to end child marriage at local, national and continental levels in Africa.

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