

GOOD AND PROMISING PRACTICES

ENGAGEMENT WITH TRADITIONAL LEADERS AND CULTURAL AUTHORITIES IN ENDING HARMFUL PRACTICES AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS IN AFRICA BY 2030



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PREAMBLE

UN Women has been engaging traditional and cultural leaders and authorities to re-energize their influence of culture, customs, traditions and norms as key catalysts in the efforts to end child marriage and Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C), including the development, review and enforcement of laws.

The engagements have built a co-ordinated and sustainable approach to recognise and contribute to the African Union-led commitments and campaign to end child marriage and FGM/C. It has also enhanced a collective understanding of the crisis at the end of the high abuse of children, especially child marriage, female genital mutilation and other harmful practices, and their impact on development; to share experiences, successes, best practices and challenges among each other to enable scaling up of efforts; and to set the agenda for high level consultations on movement building for traditional and cultural authorities in ending child marriage, FGM/C and promoting gender equality.

The engagement has also been informed by the realities in Africa and grounded by global commitments to advance dignity, human rights and development of African nations including the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, the Sustainable Development Goals, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the Maputo Protocol on Women's Rights, and the Africa Common Position on Ending Child Marriage.

These stakeholders requested for a compendium of good practices showcasing how traditional and

cultural leaders and authorities have engaged with their communities to end these harmful practices against women and girls. To this end, UN Women regional office for East and Southern Africa has collected a number of good practices that are replicable and feasible within this engagement. These are just a few selected examples of how these stakeholders have contributed towards ending child marriage, FGM/C and other harmful practices against women and girls in Africa.

The compendium defines a good practice within the guideline provided for in the Guide - Documenting good practices on gender equality developed by UN Women in 2015. A good practice is "an intervention, business practice, process or methodology responsive to the needs of women and girls, replicable, scalable, and succeeds in achieving gender equality and women's empowerment. The essence of identifying and sharing a good practice is to learn from others and to encourage the application of knowledge and experience to new situations as they relate to gender equality and women empowerment (GEWE). A good practice need not be viewed as prescriptive; it can be adapted to meet new challenges, becoming better as improvements are discovered."¹

1. See details on Guidance Note on documenting good practices on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment- <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2017/07/guidance-note-on-documenting-good-practices-on-gewe>

METHODOLOGY

The collection of these good practices involved extensive literary review, a consultation with traditional and cultural leaders and authorities and others in ending child marriage and other harmful practices against women and girls.

This compendium is a collation of the experiences shared by traditional leaders from meetings held in Kenya, Malawi and Nigeria (2018) and Ethiopia (2019). These are not complete and therefore, there should be follow-up to ensure that these fulfil the UN Women requirements for developing good practices.

Good Practice 1:

ADDRESSING CHILD MARRIAGE, FGM/C, AND OTHER HARMFUL PRACTICES IN MALAWI²

Senior Chief Theresa Kachindamoto of Malawi says she was installed as a chief in 2003 to her own surprise since she did not expect it as per tradition. She set out to transform negative cultural practices as a precondition of her installation as a chief.

During a community tour, she had met a 13-year-old girl with a baby. She named the father as a young man who plays football. This was her motivation to start the elimination of child marriage in her chieftdom.

Chief Kachindamoto works with village committees, government, religious leaders and others to stop this cultural practice. She spent five months moving around villages to raise awareness around child marriage while also talking to the gate keepers of the culture. She enacted by-laws and a notice to all traditional leaders in her chieftdom that no girl below 18 should be married. The by-laws were set up through a participatory approach involving other traditional leaders, NGO's, faith leaders and others.

In 2007 Chief Kachindamoto dismissed 27 traditional leaders for failing to follow the by-laws on child marriage. After two months, the dismissed traditional leaders terminated the marriages and got the girls back to school. She called the headmasters to confirm if the girls were indeed back in school and she occasionally checked on their school attendance. Then only were the leaders reinstated.

Traditional leaders have a responsibility to end harmful cultural practices in their communities. Chief Kachindamoto has also contributed to ending the visits from the *'fisi'* or *'hyena'*. Hyena refers to men who are brought to have sex with young women during initiation ceremonies. She set up by-laws that all village heads must abide by, including a ban on child marriage and the hyena visits. She has to date

dismissed 32 heads who disobeyed her by-laws. They were only reinstated after nullifying the marriages and sending the girls back to school. She set up a system of tracking girls using school heads to ensure they remained in school.

Negative traditional and cultural practices that need to be ended are child marriage, dust cleansing, initiation ceremonies, *kupimbira*, wife inheritance, and *kutomera*. They approach this by developing and enforcing the by-laws; use of mother groups to track, monitor and provide support; lobby and advocate for law reforms; engagement of traditional and religious leaders; community mobilisation and sensitisation.

To ensure success, the by-laws were a combined effort of NGOs, faith-based organizations, chiefs, village heads, police, magistrates, and local government, educators and social workers. All parties should sign the by-laws. The approach should be a holistic one ensuring coordination with District Commissioners, Education Managers and Social Workers. She, however, laments that Malawi does not have a forum for chiefs that would make things easier for the by-laws to apply across the country as well as a uniform approach to dealing with harmful practices against children.

The by-laws have made a difference in transforming cultural practices. Their enforcement has been critical in ensuring change is achieved. The major lesson learned is that engagement of community leaders is key to enforcement of by-laws and ensuring compliance. They need resources to support rescued girls, economic empowerment of households, and train more chiefs in order to scale up nationally.

2. Perspectives shared by Senior Chief Kachindamoto of Malawi during a dialogue meeting organized by UN Women in Nairobi-Kenya, 2018.

Good Practice 2:

WORKING WITH CHIEFS TO PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY, GENDER MAINSTREAMING AND ADDRESS HARMFUL PRACTICES IN BOTSWANA³

Paramount Chief Kgosi Mosadi Seboko (Botswana), who is also the chairperson of the Botswana National Gender Commission, shares how their governance system has embraced traditional and cultural leadership commonly referred to as *Bogosi*. When Botswana gained independence in 1966, her democratic and development foundations were hinged on traditional and cultural institutions including the *Kgotla* system. That is why the government of Botswana continues to recognise the importance of *Dikgosi* or traditional and cultural leaders.

This recognition of the importance of *Bogosi* (traditional and cultural leadership) led to the government adopting the *Bogosi Act* and established *Ntlo-Ya-Dikgosi* (the House of Chiefs) to ensure the institution is effective.

Currently, Botswana has tribal administration offices, in which chiefs participate in certain aspects of local government and the judiciary. It is on this premise that government constantly engages with *Dikgosi* on various issues of national interest, including mainstreaming of gender into the Customary Justice System, an exercise that commenced in 2012.

The 2012 *Pitso* (public call) was attended by 112 *Dikgosi* who came up with resolutions committing themselves to addressing gender inequalities and Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in their communities.

This led to significant progress in various areas across the country, especially after *Dikgosi* also developed their National Action Plan in 2015, which they have been implementing. The plan was reviewed in 2018 to establish progress, challenges and develop interventions.

The chief believes that the influence of traditional leaders, especially in African communities, prevails despite modernisation and urbanisation. Thus, such leaders are well positioned to play a positive role in addressing the socio-cultural factors that can mitigate the perpetuation of gender injustice, particularly GBV, FGM and child marriage.

She called for an open dialogue on the importance of emphasising capacity building of traditional leaders so that they are knowledgeable about gender and development to keep pace with emerging issues. This enables them to anticipate the risks and effects of gender inequalities and discrimination in their communities. Where tradition and customs are positive and empowering, respectful and inspiring, they must be treasured and passed on to the younger generation. However, where they are hurtful or disempowering, they must be altered or eradicated to water the tree of positive impacts.

3. Perspectives shared by Paramount Chief Kgosi Mosadi Seboko (Botswana) during a dialogue meeting organized by UN Women in Nairobi-Kenya, 2018.

Good Practice 3:

HARNESSING THE EFFORTS OF TRADITIONAL AND CULTURAL LEADERS AND AUTHORITIES TO END TEENAGE PREGNANCIES AND OTHER HARMFUL PRACTICES AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS IN LIBERIA⁴

Traditional and cultural leaders and authorities in Liberia are working on ending child marriage through a programme funded by UNFPA called Fulfilled and Empowered. Through Fulfilled and Empowered, they talk about positive ways to prevent teenage pregnancies. Traditional leaders are middlemen between government and the people. The programme was launched in 2017, seeing as teenage pregnancy and child marriage are intrinsically linked.

Paramount chiefs are being brought in to declare and agree to eliminate the twin practices. The chiefs

use town hall meetings with traditional leaders and community workshops with women and girls. The UN Women sponsored a meeting involving 10 counties, which recommended the closing of 20 places that were used for FGM/C. All except one were subsequently shut down. The major lesson is that there has been synergy between political and traditional leaders. The only major challenge is that they do not have funds to support the people who lost their livelihoods through the closure of the FGM practitioners' places of operation.

4. Perspectives shared by Paramount Chief Zanzan Karwor (Liberia) during a dialogue meeting organized by UN Women in Nairobi-Kenya, 2018.

Good Practice 4:

ENDING FGM/C AND OTHER HARMFUL PRACTICES AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS IN LIBERIA⁵

Liberia is divided into 15 counties. Ten of these practice FGM/C. Traditional leaders created an “inventory” that listed all the communities that practiced FGM/C ; and what changes they wanted to see going forward.

Ella Musu Coleman, a chief in Liberia, works towards ending FGM/C in her chiefdom through raising awareness, renouncing FGM/C, and closing down FGM centres with the help of the UN Women and other stakeholders. Coleman has closed down 21 centres so far and always invites stakeholders, government officials and the UN to witness the closing ceremonies.

Coleman works with the communities to prepare alternative activities and cultural institutions that will replace those centres for the practitioners. It is important, however, to provide adequate economic

opportunities support to the people that formally engaged in FGM to enable them transition from their trade smoothly and let go of the trade they served as a source of revenue for them for so long.

Not supporting them may force them to go underground in order to continue earning a living. All stakeholders are involved in supporting their transition into other productive activities. The chief has committed to innovating more ways to protect the girls and continuously engages community members so that FGM/C does not return to communities that have abandoned the practice. She concluded by saying that giving appropriate support and recognition to traditional and cultural leaders is key to ending FGM/C in Liberia.

5. Perspectives shared by Paramount Chief Madam Ella Musu Coleman (Liberia) during a dialogue meeting organized by UN Women in Lagos-Nigeria, 2018.

Good Practice 5:

LEVERAGING RELIGION TO END FGM/C AND OTHER HARMFUL PRACTICES AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS IN ETHIOPIA⁶

In Ethiopia, religious leaders, with support from Norwegian Church Aid, lead the campaign to change the mindsets of the people around FGM/C. They first identify where FGM/C is practised, carry out detailed assessments, and target religious leaders using Islamic Doctrine emphasizing that the Quran does not endorse or support FGM/C.

They enforce this message through engaging Islamic scholars who help explain that FGM/C is not a religious requirement. They advocate for the protection of girls

through community level by-laws so that offenders can be punished and sanctioned; engage with Madras (Islamic schools) to provide psycho-social support to survivors at those schools, all the while emphasizing the lack of religious backing for FGM/C. They sensitize people through radio and television, using Islamic scholars, over sports and other popular programmes, to inform people that Islam does not support FGM/C. The approach is making headway because of its involvement of Ethiopian religious leaders who have a wide reach and are a credible source of information.

6. Perspectives shared by Sultan Ahmed Mohammed (Ethiopian Islamic FGM Council-Ethiopia) during a dialogue meeting organized by UN Women in Nairobi-Kenya, 2018.

Good Practice 6:

ALTERNATIVE RITES OF PASSAGE TO ADDRESS HARMFUL PRACTICES AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS IN BOTSWANA⁷

Kgosi Rebecca Banika is from Panamatenga in Botswana and is a paramount chief as well as a women's rights activist. She received the President's Award for her work on ending GBV and empowering women in her chieftdom from President Mokgweetsi Masisi.

Rites of passage, which do not involve FGM/C, except the pulling of the labia for girls (to please men), and circumcision for boys, were banned during the colonial era. These practices were seen as barbaric and inhumane. The initiation ceremonies were used to pass on useful information about sexuality, sexual health, good manners, and responsible citizenship to young people besides the circumcision and labia elongation aspects.

These have come back in a modified manner following the findings of a Commission of Inquiry set up to find out the reasons for the rise in teenage pregnancies and violence against girls and women. The Commission, which was led by a paramount chief found that since the ban of the initiation ceremonies, there were no alternatives in place to fill the vacuum. This led to gaps *vis-à-vis* support in parenting and developing youths into responsible community members.

The Commission found that there was low parental guidance to youths during the critical period of adolescence, leaving them to indulge in teen sex, drugs and alcohol. The community fabric was completely torn apart. One of the recommendations was to restart the initiation schools but modified to respect human rights, health and the wellbeing of youths (especially girls).

Two initiation practices *Bogwera* (initiation school for boys) and *Bojale* (initiation school for girls) were recommended. Circumcision is for boys only and must happen in hospitals. Also, no circumcision or pulling of the labia is carried out for girls.

The recommendations emphasized that the schools must focus on teaching life skills, how to be responsible human beings and parents and how to be a better member of the society. The learning takes a month (complete with a syllabus) and there is a big ceremony to welcome them back into the community once they graduate.

7. Perspectives shared by Paramount Chief Kgosi Rebecca Banika (Botswana) during a dialogue meeting organized by UN Women in Lagos-Nigeria, 2018.

Tabulated summary of selected good practices on ending child marriage, FGM/C and other harmful practices against women and girls in Africa

Country	Good Practice
Ghana	Chief's House; Setting up a scholarship fund for girls to ensure that girls stay in school
Malawi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of community by-laws using survivors of child marriages as advocates against child marriage • Establishment of parent circles to reach out to parents on the importance of girl education • Using male champions to discourage men from marrying young girls
Zambia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction of community by-laws • Provision of educational support to vulnerable children so that they remain in school • National Chiefs Council involved in ending harmful practices
Cameroon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobilisation of wives of traditional leaders as queens for peace who are empowered to halt harmful traditional practices • Engaging boys and traditional leaders as champions to end child marriages
Kenya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enacting laws criminalising FGM and child marriage • Empowering the girl child through free primary education and subsidized secondary education programmes that help girls to stay in school
Ethiopia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Religious leaders' initiative and commitment to end FGM and child marriage through introduction of Islamic decree (Fatwa) • Raising the age of marriage for both boys and girls to 21
Nigeria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Laws ban FGM. Indeed, the laws have a mandatory reporting element stating that anyone who witnesses someone undergoing FGM and does not report gets a 2-3 year sentence. Development of the laws were accompanied with a mass campaign to raise awareness.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This compendium on Engagement with Traditional Leaders and Cultural Authorities in Ending Harmful Traditional Practices Against Women and Girls in Africa by 2030 has been developed by Kondwani Mwangulube, Sadiq Ahamad Jilani Syed, Jack Onyisi Abebe and Michael Faraday for UN Women in Africa under the overall leadership of Zebib Kavuma-Deputy Regional Director-UN Women East and Southern Africa. It is meant to accelerate progress towards ending harmful practices against women and girls in Africa through peer learning in Africa on what works in diverse jurisdictions.

View the report at: <http://africa.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications>

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A GLOBAL CHAMPION FOR WOMEN
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ESTABLISHED TO ACCELERATE
PROGRESS ON MEETING THEIR
NEEDS WORLDWIDE.**

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to implement these standards. It stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on five priority areas: increasing women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.



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