



Commitment of the Council of Traditional Leaders of Africa (COTLA) towards the elimination of violence against women and girls.

It is a reality that our region carries the highest prevalence of child marriage and female genital mutilation in the world, impacting millions of our girls. These harmful traditional practices have devastating impact including loss of life, risk of disease such as fistula, loss of education and life opportunities, trauma and other psycho-social impacts resulting in deepening poverty and perpetuating a cycle of abuse. This calls on us as traditional and religious leaders to urgently assume our role as protectors of our children. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the prevalence of gender-based violence in our countries and communities.

Being silent is no longer an option, as it makes us complicit to these crimes and perpetuates the assumptions that child marriage and female genital mutilation are sanctioned by culture or religion. We, publicly condemn all cultural and traditional practices that are harmful to women and girls and repugnant to our traditional values and to notions of natural law and justice. We further note that eliminating child marriage and FGM are essential steps to realizing gender equality and several of the Sustainable Development Goals including targets on health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, decent work, and economic growth.

It is therefore on this premise that we the leadership and members of the Council of Traditional Leaders of Africa (COTLA) commit to ideals and efforts of Generation Equality Forum and undertake steps towards the elimination of violence against women and girls. We commit to prevent and eliminate harmful traditional practices against women and girls in communities across Africa. As COTLA we commit to join hands in supporting government effort and other partners such as joint EU- UN Spotlight Initiative towards ending child marriage and FGM. COTLA will mobilize traditional institutions to develop and implement community-based approaches aimed at addressing the social dynamics underpinning the continuation of child marriage and FGM and other harmful practices. As COTLA we further reiterate that we are not by-standers, we are active advocates for laws and policies, ending early and child marriage in our communities and creating safe spaces, while promoting gender-transformative practices to ensure women and girls achieve their highest potential through the following:

Legal Framework and public policy

- Champion the cause of gender equality and positive masculinity through intensified community engagements.
- Double our efforts toward Goal 5 of the SDG by intensifying advocacy initiatives and policy dialogue to accelerate the end of child marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting by 2030.
- Support and intensify grassroots-led movements against FGM and other harmful practices by holding regular dialogues (at least once a month) with community actors, women's groups.
- Conduct a gender-responsive review of customary laws that address access to justice for victims/survivors and punishments for perpetrators by 2023.
- Support governments to enact and enforce laws in African countries that protect women and ensure no perpetrator evades justice in our kingdoms and chiefdoms.



The full and equal participation of women and girls in their diversity shall be ensured;

- That by 2023, through targeted, intensive community mobilization and dialogue, no family in our communities will prioritize child marriage over the education of the girl-child.
- To promote positive masculinity to embody and act as role models in our communities and families by targeting engagement of at least 80% of men in our communities as allies for gender equality and women's empowerment.
- Support governments across Africa to protect the right of the girl child emphasizing investments in sexual and reproductive health (SRH), and by ensuring that menstrual hygiene of young girls is prioritized and accessible by 2030.
- In the context of COVID19 pandemic ravaging communities and its twin pandemic, of gender-based violence, we will amplify advocacy for significant investments in psychosocial and mental health support to victims and survivors in our communities.
- Establish monitoring mechanisms to track progress on efforts towards responding and preventing gender-based violence in Africa.