

# A COORDINATED GRASSROOTS PARTNERSHIP TO END CHILD MARRIAGE IN GHANA

Ghana has one of the lowest prevalence rates of child marriage in West Africa (21% of girls married under 18), but rates can be as high as 39% in the some parts of the country.

Child marriage in Ghana is deeply rooted in tradition and discriminatory gender norms. Parents' decision to marry off their daughter is often driven by concerns about female sexuality and family honour, in particular the fear that girls might become pregnant outside marriage. Poverty and a lack of access to education also exacerbate the problem. At the national and community levels, the platforms for girls to learn about issues, or participate in discussions and decision-making that affect their lives are inadequate.

In a bid to unite civil society efforts and raise the voices of girls, *Girls Not Brides* members came together to form a National Partnership in 2014. Today, *Girls Not Brides* Ghana comprises over 60 members across the ten regions of the country, working together to create opportunities for girls to fulfil their potential.

## **Community-based organisations came together to influence the government's national strategy**

The National Partnership contributed to the development of the government's national strategy to end child marriage by participating in national dialogues. "We were very active in ensuring that issues relating to child marriage were well integrated, bringing



in best practices from the communities we work with. This local knowledge is critical for the development of National Policies.” says Barima Akwasi Amankwaah, member to the National Partnership, and national coordinator of the Ghana NGO Coalition on the Rights of the Child. By bringing together grassroots organisations from across the country *Girls Not Brides* Ghana was able to bring realities directly from communities to the table.

The partnership also advocated for the allocation of adequate resources towards preventing child marriage and implementing the national strategy. This includes fully funding the Child Marriage Unit, which was set up under the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection to coordinate interventions under the strategy.

The partnership uses international days to raise awareness of the importance of addressing the issue and its scale across the country. “Collectively, we are adopting a bottom-up approach to awareness raising. Policymakers need to understand dynamics at the grassroots levels in order to inform policies that respond to communities’ and in particular women and girls’ needs,” says Barima.

These efforts wouldn’t be possible without a well-structured system in place, including ten regional coordinators. The Western

Regional Coordinator, Agyapa Buah, faces several challenges in the communities where he works. “[There is a] low level of commitment from community members due to social norms. Some of the girls are engaged in economic activities including illegal mining work, which makes them harder to reach for any intervention, and finding shelter for victims of child marriage is also a challenge,” he explains. With the support of *Girls Not Brides* Ghana, his organisation (Support for Community Mobilisation, Project and Programmes) formed five girls’ clubs in schools and trained teachers to act as chaperones, two child protection committees at the regional level, and 30 at the community level.

He reports: “Because of *Girls Not Brides* Ghana, and as a regional coordinator, I have been able to mobilise civil society organisations to contribute to ending child marriage in my region. I have been successful in liaising with state actors, traditional authorities, and parents in five districts who now understand and appreciate the value of providing equal opportunities to girls, instead of giving them for marriage.”

Barima concludes: “Regional coordinators have impacted our efforts [...] We are now able to be more cost-efficient and effective, and reach more people for more impact.”

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**GIRLS NOT BRIDES**

The Global Partnership  
to End Child Marriage

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