



WORKING COLLECTIVELY TO RAISE THE AGE OF MARRIAGE IN MALAWI

With 42% of girls married before their 18th birthday, Malawi has one of the highest rates of child marriage in the world.

A key challenge to ending child marriage in Malawi is gender inequality, including entrenched attitudes and beliefs that girls should be responsible for taking care of their families rather than receive an education. It is also closely linked to poverty, as often parents marry off their daughters to have one less mouth to feed.

In an effort to work together to address child marriage, the National Partnership *Girls Not Brides* Malawi was formed in 2013. Today, it comprises over 90 civil society organisations.

In 2015, thanks to collective action by civil society, Malawi passed the Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations Act, raising the age of marriage to 18 years. But there was a loophole in the constitution meaning girls as young as 15 could get married with parental consent. At the time, many activists believed that changing the constitution would be too difficult. *Girls Not Brides* Malawi took on this challenge. Members working across all districts in Malawi were able to share updates and opportunities, learn from and scale up best practices, as well as collectively advocate.

The collective work of members led to increased credibility and visibility of *Girls Not Brides* Malawi

A strong collective voice and shared expertise results in strong advocacy for change

The National Partnership engaged with influential actors at both local and national levels to advocate for a constitutional change. At three regional and one national symposia, members of *Girls Not Brides* Malawi mobilised youths, community chiefs, religious leaders, parliamentarians, government officials and UN agencies to support the call to action. Their work was recognised by the Ministry of Gender, who entrusted *Girls Not Brides* Malawi to set up a multi-actor taskforce to agree on next steps. “That collaboration really helped to move things forward,” says Julie Juma, Education Programme Manager at ActionAid, and former chair of *Girls Not Brides* Malawi.

In February 2017, Parliament voted unanimously to amend the constitution and harmonise the laws, raising the legal age of marriage to 18 without exception. “If we were working in isolation, we would not be able to achieve what we are achieving,” says Mr Weston Msowoya, National Coordinator of *Girls Not Brides* Malawi and Executive Director of the Centre for Community and Youth Development. “Having a wide network in many districts means more organisations are prioritising child marriage. Raising our voice collectively has raised our profile in the country and opened doors to new opportunities,” says Weston.

Collective efforts bring increased credibility and visibility to member organisations

“Being part of the national partnership has had an impact on our individual organisations because we have since been invited to engage in a lot of policy decision-making spaces,” says Juma. On International Day of the Girl 2018, the National Partnership was invited to speak at a national commemoration and to profile their work.

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GIRLS NOT BRIDES

The Global Partnership
to End Child Marriage