

Working Together To End Child Marriage

East Africa Regional Conference on Child Marriage

Conference Summary Report

Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania
June 2013

Organised jointly by:
FORWARD, CDF and TECMN

FORWARD
Safeguarding rights & dignity



FORWARD

The Foundation for Women’s Health Research and Development (FORWARD) is an African Diaspora women led campaign and support charity dedicated to advancing and safeguarding the sexual and reproductive health and rights of African women and girls. We work in the UK, Europe and Africa to help change practices and policies that affect access, dignity and wellbeing. We tackle female genital mutilation (FGM), child marriage, obstetric fistula and related health/rights issues affecting girls and young women. We work with individuals, communities and organisations to transform harmful practices and improve the quality of life of vulnerable girls and women.

FORWARD’s Vision: Women and girls live in dignity, are healthy and have choices and equal opportunities.

FORWARD is a co-host of the UK Girls Not Brides National Partnership to End Child Marriage.

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Children’s Dignity Forum (CDF)

The core aim of CDF is to improve dignity and human rights of children in Tanzania. CDF is a not-for-profit organisation that works to promote and reinforce rights of vulnerable children - particularly girls - by placing children’s legal and human rights on the public agenda; creating a working forum to empower children, families and the society in general; and developing capacity and skills to address harmful practices. CDF’s key areas of work include ending female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage, child protection and child participation.

CDF’s Vision: A Tanzanian society where children live in dignity, have rights and accorded social justice.

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The Tanzania Ending Child Marriage Network

The Tanzania Ending Child Marriage Network (TECMN) is a network of 21 organisations committed to ending child marriage. TECMN provides a platform for civil society organisations to engage in policy advocacy, campaign action and to shape programmes to end child marriage. **CDF** is the founding member and co-ordinator of TECMN.

TECMN is also a member of **Girls Not Brides:** The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage.

Acknowledgements

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Finally, a big thank you to all the girls from our project in Mara Region who attended this conference and shared their intimate stories of child marriage. We commend your courage in speaking out and giving us all the inspiration to continue to campaign to end child marriage.



Standing applause for the girls who spoke to the conference about their personal experiences of child marriage.

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Introduction

“We need to be very vocal on the issue of child marriage. It is the responsibility for everybody. Documentation of success stories is critical; media strategy must be developed to give information to communities.” (Feedback from a conference participant)

The East Africa Regional Conference on Child Marriage which took place from the 12-13th June 2013 in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania gave visibility and a sense of urgency to the problem of child marriage. The conference was jointly organised by Foundation for Women’s Health Research and Development (FORWARD), Children’s Dignity Forum (CDF), and the Tanzania End Child Marriage Network. The network is a partnership of 20 organisations that are leading the work of responding to child marriage in Tanzania. The conference was in direct response to requests from End Child Marriage Network members and FORWARD project partners in East Africa to learn from other countries in the region on current interventions on child marriage.

The conference was also pre-empted by the visit in December 2012 to Tanzania by Graça Machel, from the Elders Group who initiated Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage. Mrs Machel’s meeting with members of the Tanzania End Child Marriage Network explored the need to strengthen the capacity of the network and pledged to support this process. The conference received generous support from The Sigrid Rausing Trust, The Graça Machel Trust and UNFPA Tanzania.

This summary report provides a flavour of the conference presentations, discussions, reflections and the conclusions and recommendations. The take home messages from the participants’ evaluations mentioned strengthening collaboration and advocacy action, and involving those affected by child marriage. The majority of participants felt that more time was needed for discussions and workshop sessions to enable them to explore the issues better.



Overview of the conference

Child marriage is a global problem that impedes the development, wellbeing and life options of affected individuals and their families. In the past ten years child marriage has emerged as one of the neglected human rights violations and has only recently started to receive global attention. UNFPA estimates that, in the next decade, 100 million girls are expected to marry before they are 18 years old. In Africa over 42% of girls are married before they reach the age of 18, with millions of girls being given away just before they attain puberty. Furthermore, 31 out of the 41 countries where the prevalence rates of child marriage are more than 30% are African countries. UNFPA estimates indicate that East Africa continues to have the largest burden of child marriage in Africa.

The two day East African Regional Conference on Child Marriage was attended by 85 people from 12 countries: Ethiopia, Ghana, Ireland, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, United Kingdom, and Zambia. The conference participants included Tanzanian girls and young women affected by child marriage; the Minister of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs in Zambia and officials from the government of Tanzania; traditional chiefs/leaders; United Nations officials; academics; representatives from civil society organisations; and international as well as regional partners. The conference brought together a wide range of stakeholders from different sectors working on child marriage; women's and girls' rights; gender based violence; and development.

The conference created a valuable platform for information-sharing and building skills on a national and sub-regional context of child marriage; new programme responses; regional and global level policy developments; and skill building and learning. It also offered networking and collaboration strengthening opportunities.

The aims of the conference were as follows:

- **To Share** current child marriage interventions and developments at a national, regional and global level; identifying policy and programme lessons and strategies for the prevention of child marriages and support for affected-child brides, child mothers and child widows
- **To Strengthen** skill building, evidence development, and the capacity of key actors
- **To Enhance and galvanize** national and sub-regional advocacy actions
- **To Strengthen** national, regional and global networks and partnerships for ending child marriage

Expectations from participants

Participants had the opportunity during the introductory session to reflect on why they had come to the conference and what they expected to take back to their organisations. The overwhelming view was a 'deep concern' about the extent of the problem of child marriage on development and its negative impact on girls and young women. Some conference participants have been personally affected or have seen family members forced into child marriages. There was a general consensus to learn more about tackling child marriage from the experiences gleaned from others, and to identify better ways of working together to end the practice.



Girls from CDF/FORWARD Project in Musoma & Tarime



1. Conference Programme

“The take home message for me was the importance of political will and identifying champions at the highest level, as well as working with traditional leaders at a local level”

(Feedback from a conference participant)

1.1. Understanding the context of child marriage in East Africa

The presenters from FORWARD, DFID Ethiopia, CDF and Mifumi explored the different contexts of child marriage in East Africa and key determinants, citing examples from Ethiopia, Tanzania and Uganda. Child marriage was defined as ‘*the formal and informal union or marriage before the age of 18 years*’. Evidence presented in the conference indicated that child marriage is highly prevalent in the East Africa region and affecting much younger girls. Statistics from most East African countries show that more than 30% of young women between 20-24 years of age are married before the age of 18. However, there are differences between countries, and urban-rural and regional disparities within a country. In some highly affected parts the prevalence reaches as high as 46% in Uganda and 50% in Malawi. However, in general the practice occurs more frequently among girls who are poor and living in rural areas, with no access or limited access to education.



Koshuma Mtengeti, Executive Director of Children’s Dignity Forum (CDF)

The session explored the causes and consequences of child marriage in East Africa, pinpointing tradition, and social and economic reasons as the key drivers. In many communities marriage gives

girls social recognition and acceptance. Additionally, families use marriage to strengthen their family ties, and obtain 'bride price'. Poverty, conflict and instability in the region also fuel the practice of child marriage. In most cases child marriages are arranged by fathers. The adverse effects of child marriage were outlined in all the presentations, detailing the severe physical, emotional and psychological complications. This practice also prevents girls from reaching their full potential. The data cited from the UNFPA 2012 study on child marriage showed the region as having the highest prevalence rates of child marriage in Africa. Child marriage results in high school drop-out and impairs the livelihood options of girls and has inter-generational impact on families and communities.

The general discussions argued that opposing child marriage as a 'harmful practice' may not be a good strategy. A better way would be to view it as a form of violence against women and girls. Bride price was cited as the single most economic motivator for parents marrying off their children; and was also a major factor which prevents girls from leaving a child marriage - since the tradition often required returning the bride price at divorce. Participants highlighted the urgent need to tackle the demand side of child marriage, including the social norms, social systems and structures, and the bigger context of patriarchy in Africa.



1.2. Programme interventions and strategies

The session explored promising programme interventions, action research and strategies on child marriage and related areas which provided lessons and insights for participants. The presenters from Girl Hub Programme in Rwanda; Girls Empowerment Network of Malawi; Population Council, Tanzania and Raising Voices from Uganda shared practical approaches and experiences. They had innovative programmes on child marriage, working with girls and with communities to tackle gender based violence. Five key programme strategies discussed in this session are highlighted below.

Multi-dimensional approach: The cause of child marriage is complex and its impact is cross-sectional. In tackling this complex old tradition there is no 'one size fits all' intervention. The approach needs to address all levels and all sectors using innovative strategies based on the needs and challenges of specific communities and countries. The presenters all expressed the value-added role of working at multiple levels and targeting all sectors; community; policy makers and health and education sectors.

Empowering girls and placing girls at the centre of social change process: The two presentations shared the need and importance of informing and empowering girls. Using strong branding; media; stories and documentaries to showcase the situation of girls has proved to be effective and enabled girls to map out their community context; their life experiences, and has influenced change in community bylaws. Programmes should include working with girls at risk as well as supporting child brides and child mothers through targeted interventions. They should also give girls the opportunity to return to education or explore and seize other opportunities for better health and livelihood options. Conference participants affirmed that involving girls at all levels of intervention is vital to heighten efforts in ending child marriage.

Girls' voices have great power for breaking the silence about child marriage and giving real life evidence for making the case at national and international levels engaging communities, political leaders and policy makers. Putting girls' voices at the centre of the social change ensures transformational change that addresses the needs of girls. It also allows girls to become active participants rather than passive receivers - allowing them to have better opportunity to understand their situation. This point was further exemplified by a sofa discussion with eight young mothers (from CDF project in Mara Region, Tanzania) who were affected by child marriage. The sofa session with the girls raised the following issues:

- The girls' experiences of child marriage and the marriage arrangement process
- What marriage life is like for girls, and the experiences and challenges that married girls face
- How the project intervention has changed the lives of girls and young women.

"I had severe psycho-social trauma. But a girl from CDF said, 'No. No. You can make it. Hey, Belinda; don't give up'. Sometimes it takes us to hold their hands, because they just can't get out of that situation. 'Now I can stand before people. This hall even seems small. I can stand in front of even a bigger crowd.'" Former child bride detailing how the project has changed her life

Community empowerment and mobilisation: The presenter used the example of a community-based programme on violence against women and HIV (SASA) being implemented by Raising Voices in Uganda. This is based on the process of public health behaviour change, and personal and collective empowerment. The programme demonstrated the value of intense and long term community engagement and mobilisation, and the role of collaborating with academics to ensure the robust collection of evidence which would make the learning process more effective. The approach is based on a long-term strategic action to bring the desired attitude and behavioural change, including tackling social norms, and influencing the community to abandon the practice of child marriage. The core areas of the approach include:

- **Start** – building Knowledge and attitude
- **Awareness** raising – regarding power imbalance
- **Support** – Building skills for taking action
- **Action** phase – changing behaviour

The structure of SASA is based on an ecological model of influence which requires creating a critical mass to influence change based on local activism; working with the media; using innovative advocacy and communication materials and resources, including the SASA DVD and training programme. The training programme focuses on addressing the core drivers of violence and tackles different elements of power. This model is equally applicable to child marriage, especially in tackling the deeply embedded social, cultural and traditional beliefs as well as power dynamics which are associated with the practice.

Data collection and evidence based interventions: The presentation showcased an ongoing action research being implemented by Population Council in Tabora Region in Tanzania. The intervention

highlighted the lack of strategic focus on married girls and the vulnerabilities they faced in the region. The central role of data collection and evidence in intervention programmes was stressed and tips for data collection and evidence was shared, which included some of the following:

- Use the evidence base to understand the realities of adolescent girls, parents, and communities
- Question assumptions that are used to design programmes - including educational participation and attainment; the extent of arranged marriages; marital exchanges etc.
- Make maximum use of existing resources, secondary data, community and human resources
- Collect and use data that helps to achieve broad social change - not individual behavior change
- Track program costs and question assumptions about ‘sustainability’

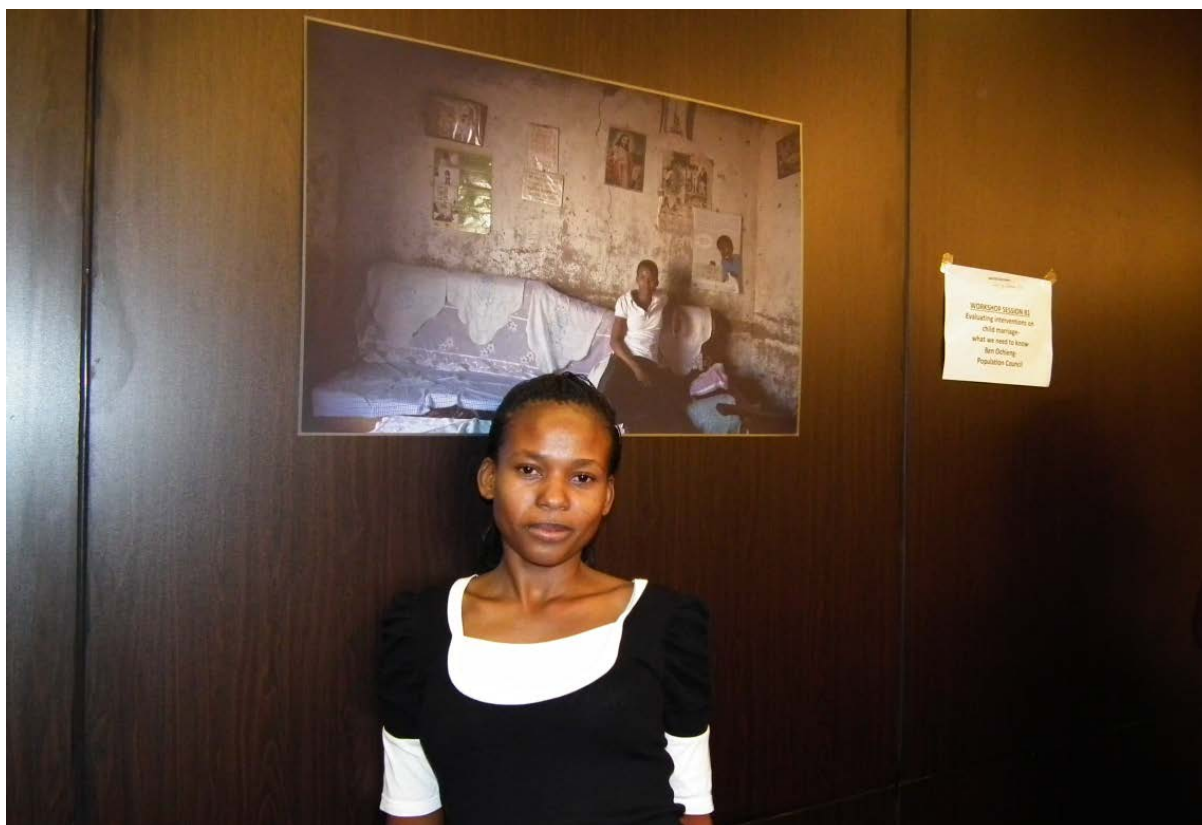
The implications of the on-going research for programme interventions was shared and included the need for targeting programmes at key decision makers and parents who oversee the marriage process. This intervention is being rolled out in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia and Tanzania and will test cost approaches to delay child marriage in hotspots with a particular focus on community sensitization; promoting schooling and cash transfers.

Using creative art and fiction: The conference exhibited photography and other models of cultural expressions to display the invisible and hidden forms of harmful cultural practices. Portraits depicting the lives of child brides and child mothers and their children were displayed throughout the conference and included some of the young women from Tarime who took part in the conference. Framed copies of the pictures were presented to all of the girls.



Gavin Weston, Author of *Harmattan*, a novel on child marriage, and FORWARD Ambassador

Gavin Weston an author and FORWARD Ambassador who wrote the fictional novel “Harmattan” about child marriage in Niger shared his experience of writing about child marriage and the power of fiction in portraying and influencing reality as well as raising visibility of the problem.



One of the girls from Tarime next to her photo which is part of a collection of images of child brides by the photographer Chiara Ceolin.

1.3. Working with key actors and development partners

The second day of the conference focused on working with key actors and sectors that have power to influence and drive social changes. Targeting and working with these key actors would help to galvanise the process of social change. The keynote address; panel presentations, group discussions and workshops looked at ways of working with different key actors to tackle child marriage.

Working together to place child marriage on the development agenda

Ending child marriage requires a justice system that respects human rights, and enabling social and economic policy environments to exercise those rights. Therefore, engaging national and regional lawmakers and decision makers would enable these actors to work on laying the legal ground and policies for ending child marriage, and address the core driving factor of poverty. The conference discussion emphasised vital roles of policy makers in ending child marriage. *Prof Nkandu Luo*, the Minister of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs in Zambia who is leading the first government led campaign to end child marriage in Africa stated in her keynote address that “*tackling child marriage is an obligation of governments and not civil society organizations*”. This national campaign works through strategic partners from key government ministries; traditional leaders and civil society actors and uses the national media to raise awareness. Although the current minimum age of marriage is below 18 years in the Zambia the government has shown the need to develop on-going national action alongside the process of reviewing the existing legislation on child marriage.

Working with Donors, National and international Development partners

The speaker from the Grace Machel Trust made a clear case for working with key donors and development partners to end child marriage. They demonstrated the impact and added value of engaging key actors in addressing the main drivers of child marriage, designing longer term programmes which bring longer lasting changes to people's attitudes. There was the need to make the case to donors and development partners using evidence-based advocacy to help achieve quicker wins: This should focus on the following:

- Involve more partners and players (e.g. MAI initiative in Malawi)
- Present a convincing business case (life stories, hard data)
- Demonstrate incremental successes in CM programming including successful pilots closer home
- Linking child marriage to all other development initiatives at country, regional and global levels.

UNFPA Tanzania outlined the obligations of state parties who sign treaty documents and the added value of a human rights based approach in tackling child marriage. The presentation gave examples of on-going work with duty bearers in Tanzania and their approach in engaging stakeholders and the support given to rights holders enabling them access information and decision-making processes.

The role of the Media

“The media as a primary source of information plays a very powerful role in shaping the dialogues that eventually lead to policy change.” (Valerie Msoka, TAMWA)

The media is one of the powerful allies in creating social change in society, and the presentation from the Tanzania Women Media Association added practical guidance to earlier focus on working with the media to address child marriage. It is important for child marriage advocates to use media platforms to broadcast their messages to the local community as well as national policy and decision makers because the media often helps set the agenda and is often trusted by the public. Working with the media requires providing journalists with evidence and case studies, and engaging them early, as part of the programme intervention. Knowing how to use and work with the media is a way forward to strengthen the campaign for ending child marriage. This requires identifying the right media platform, using multiple media channels, and appropriate evidence.

Tips for effective engagement with the media were also outlined. These included knowing what to do; setting goals; knowing what goals to set; knowing what you want to say; knowing how to package what you want to say; choosing a spokesperson to deliver the message; and how to deliver the message effectively.

Placing child marriage on the agenda of national and regional bodies

The Africa Child Policy Forum gave a comprehensive overview on child marriage legislation and related regional and international standards that relate to women and children, outlining the countries that are party to these treaties. The obligations of state parties to key treaties were reiterated as well as a review on the minimum age of marriage and key policy documents which contains this law. The different legal approaches to child marriage were outlined and a recommendation was proposed for adopting a good legal system for protection from child marriage. This included:

1. Adopting a consolidated law on children
2. Setting the minimum age of marriage to 18 years - without exceptions
3. Criminalising child marriage and setting clear sanctions

4. Having an effective birth and marriage registration system
5. Establishing the necessary institutional framework and enforcement mechanisms such as specialised Children's Courts
6. Being accountable to treaty bodies by submitting timely country reports. Civil society organisations can play a strategic role in ensuring that government fulfil their obligations through advocating for policy reform; submitting shadow reports and developing general comments.

The Women's Legal Aid Centre shared on-going efforts by women's rights activists to take advantage of the review process to draft the new constitution of Tanzania to raise the minimum age of marriage in Tanzania which currently allows 15-year-old girls to get married. The challenges between the co-existence of national laws and customary and religious laws were outlined areas which needed urgent attention. Although the government had signed a number of regional and international women's rights treaties these have not been adequately domesticated, indicating failure of the government to fulfil its international obligations. This process will require making effective use of representatives in constitutional tribunals as well as working through the constitution assembly to influence change.

1.4. Building partnerships to end child marriage

The Africa Coordinator of Girls not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage provided insights into collective action to end child marriage through the approaches they had used to develop their global partnerships. This global partnership was co-ordinated through the realisation that child marriage is a cross-cutting global issue and ending it will have to involve working together. The 250 members of the network from more than 40 countries range from grassroots to international organisations. In order to create strong partnerships a clear structure and roles and responsibilities must be critical to guide the partnership. In the case of Girls Not Brides, their structure comprises of a small secretariat based in London; members; and national partnerships; member working groups, and an advisory committee. The strength of collective action was discussed as a way forward in ending child marriage and by focussing on small but focused actions to drive the campaign forward which attracts confidence and support from policy makers and donors. She cited the role of the secretariat in supporting advocacy and raising the profile of the work of the members and the value of sharing learning and building capacity of members to be effective at local level.

The Tanzania Ending Child Marriage Network (TECMN) shared their experiences, highlighting lessons and achievements to date. The network was formed in 2011 and consists of 20 organisations from all over Tanzania, working together to increase the visibility of child marriage issues. They also promote girls rights to education, health, and opportunities to fulfil their potential through influencing existing initiatives such as UNFPA, UNICEF, government ministries and departments and other NGO's. The network has a strong focus on partnership building at all levels, and works through working groups and forums within the network. They worked collaboratively with the Department of Social Welfare, regional executives and ward and village officials, provided training on referrals, identification of girls at risk and other services to community organisations and other NGO's. The network's upcoming focus will include exploring the provision of psychological support for girls and young women, providing shelter for girls and young women who flee marriage, and the reintegration of girls in society through education, and business etc. Through sharing and utilising member's expertise, the network has together identified areas lacking in support for married girls and the structures needed to ensure girls at risk are identified and properly cared for at local levels.

2. Skill building sessions

“New ideas, techniques and experiences on ending child marriage - which I learnt from the conference - is what I am taking back to my organisation.” (Feedback from a conference participant)

The skill building sessions provided an opportunity for participants to learn new ideas; practice new skills and explore in-depth strategies and programme approaches. Two sessions were conducted in Swahili only, in order to enable participants from Tanzania to effectively participate.

Evaluating interventions on child marriage - what we need to know was based on the session about developing evidence in interventions and it explored the need for setting up effective systems for capturing results in child marriage interventions. The session reviewed the basics of monitoring and evaluation, and shared indicators for assessing programmes on child marriage.

The participants talked about and shared experiences on how best to plan, monitor, evaluate and learn from the programmes on child marriage. They also discussed the challenges of measuring impacts on some child marriage programmes. Overall, the group agreed that a monitoring and evaluation plan needed to be developed at the programme planning stage. The programme intervention should be monitored regularly and lessons should be used for learning and improving implementation. All programmes need to include a midterm and final evaluation using scientific methods and should ensure that all stakeholders including service beneficiaries actively involved.



Participants from Kenya, on the right, Caroline Lentupuru from Sinyati Womens Group, a FORWARD partner.

Engaging men and boys explored strategies for mobilizing and engaging men and boys on sexual and reproductive health matters and discussed promising approaches to effective engagement. The workshop developed an agreed view on engaging men and boys – a term which is often not clearly defined. They discussed the added value of child marriage intervention programmes to effectively engage men and boys due to their key role in perpetuating the practice. The recommendations from this workshop included the need to improve understanding of the types of interventions at grassroots level and show how men can be involved in these programmes. There was also a need to identify gaps as well as promising approaches at a national and international level.



Working with girls through clubs and networks explored strategies for working with girls and young women affected by child marriage, focusing mainly on the establishment of girls clubs in schools and young women’s networks to support child brides, child mothers and child widows. Participants shared their programme experiences and lessons. The workshop outlined the process of starting new clubs and provided tips for new club members who had attended the conference to help set up their own clubs in their communities. Girls shared the lessons from working in the clubs and networks and noted that by working together with the police gender desk at police stations and other organisations has enabled child marriage to be more visible within the community.

Entrepreneurship development focused on the basics for entrepreneurship development and the need for enabling vulnerable girls and young women to have a better understanding of the basics of financial and business skills as part of programme interventions for girls and women. This involves developing skills as well as business set up. Entrepreneurship development is directly relevant to child marriage primarily because of the potential to generate income and it provides employment for girls who drop out of school as well as tackles the drivers of child marriage. However, entrepreneurship programmes and training need to take into consideration the local context, and the capacity and interest of the girls to aid the design of entrepreneurship programmes.



Designing programmes for girls shared programme strategies developed as part of the innovative programme supported by DFID and Nike under the Girl Hub programme. It shared elements of the design programmes and work with key partners to promote voice, assets and skills. This included the use of branding, ICT tools, innovative investments, messaging and how to deliver results for girls. The workshop provided a platform to learn from other interventions targeting girls and those at risk. The agreed recommendations for effective programming focused on ensuring the meaningful participation of girls – building their capacity to participate; gathering evidence on context and issues from a girl’s perspective. It also focussed on ensuring parental involvement and sustaining girls programmes through creating an enabling environment for governments and traditional leaders to commit to girls.

Participatory Ethnographic Evaluation Research (PEER): The workshop provided an overview to using PEER (Participatory Ethnographic Evaluation and Research) techniques. This process is based on using peer researchers from the community helps to empower individuals as experts on critical issues they face and results in transformation and a new-found confidence. The workshop provided a practical approach to using the participatory tool for data collection and shared tips on how PEER has been used in the Tanzania programme on child marriage. The recommendation from the workshop focused on the added value of PEER which involves affected groups and helps to reveal critical issues and suggest solutions to the problem and this is valuable for project design. PEER being participatory, empowers girls as primary stakeholders in child marriage. The girls leadership skills are enhanced and they feel part-and-parcel of the project. This creates a sense of ownership. PEER’s approach is unique and helps to ensure the participation and involvement of the most marginalised groups.

Developing communication messages and strategies provided an introduction to the “Spitfire Smart Chart”- this strategic communication tool aims to build organizations’ capacity to plan and use strategic communications to support campaign and advocacy action and bring about social change. The workshop took participants through the basic steps of this communication tool using role plays and scenario building. Participants went through the six stages of the approach and had many opportunities to practice the different techniques that were introduced.

Working with national and regional policy makers provided the basics on advocacy and tips for effective engagement of policy makers at all levels to inform and shape policy developments. Participants shared their experiences of working with parliamentarians - along with techniques for effectively incorporating advocacy work with lobbying, negotiating, and the media. The practical session provided an opportunity to explore critical issues and agenda setting for working with key policy makers at a national and regional level on child marriage. The key recommendations from this workshop focused on the need for advocacy partnerships to aim at a win-win outcome; to shift the mind-set of CSOs to recognise the value of Members of Parliament; to identify appropriate policy makers who have potential to push the child marriage agenda; and finally to be clear when to lobby as well as facilitate links between affected communities and policy makers.



Engaging traditional leaders - (Swahili Only Workshop) provided an interactive skill-building workshop on engaging traditional leadership to respond to gender based violence, as well as women's and girls' rights. They shared tips and techniques for working with traditional leaders to become champions and advocates. Traditional leaders are custodians of cultural norms and laws that fuel the practice of child marriage, so require effective mobilization skills to get their buy-in for programmes to end child marriage. Traditional leaders, chiefs, and elders have a huge influence at the community level, especially in the area of traditional norms and customs. They therefore play an important role in the lives of many Africans. So, integrating the traditional value system with modern views and working together with mutual respect and understanding is critical for social change in contemporary Africa. This could open the way to work with traditional leaders and use their resources to tackle child marriage.

The experiences of Zambia's traditional leaders working on child marriage interventions were discussed again. Traditional leaders are working actively with the government and other agencies in the country on the issues of child marriage. Involving traditional leaders at local and national advocacy levels contributed significantly to mobilizing the community and raising the profile of child marriage at the national level. However, traditional leaders need to be trained and empowered in

order to be able to effectively work on the case and educate the community. It was also recommended that countries need to understand their local needs, and identify the best strategies for engaging traditional leaders according to their local context.



3. Conference call for action

“The testimonies from the girls were moving. I found the Minister from Zambia very inspiring. Child marriage can be eliminated and there is a need for all stakeholders to engage...”

(Feedback from conference participants)

This **Call for Action to End Child Marriage in Africa** is endorsed by participants who took part in a two-day East African Conference on Child Marriage in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania from 12-13th June 2013. The Call for Action specially urges the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child to develop a General Comment on Child Marriage as a matter of urgency to guide governments to fulfil their obligations to protect girls from this gross harmful human rights violation.

Child marriage is a neglected human rights violation that impedes the attainment of key Millennium Development Goals of poverty, gender equality, education and health, and adversely affects the social and economic wellbeing of girls, families, communities, and countries at large. In Africa over 42% of girls are married before they reach the age of 18 - many of them just before they attain puberty.

Additionally, 31 out of the 41 countries where the prevalence rates of child marriage are more than 30% are African countries and there seems to be little progress in ending this problem in Africa.¹

The East Africa Regional Conference on Child Marriage in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania was attended by 85 participants from 11 countries: Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, United Kingdom and Zambia. The conference explored the context of child marriage, policy and programme interventions, and strategies for addressing child marriage.² The conference participants included girls and young women affected by child marriage, the Minister of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs in Zambia and officials from the government of Tanzania, traditional chiefs, United Nations officials, academics, representatives from Civil Society Organisations, international as well as regional partners.

In her keynote Address at the conference *Prof Nkandu Luo, the Minister of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs in Zambia* called for clarity in the definition of the child in Africa and adopting an appropriate legal framework and the need to build a robust movement to place child marriage on the African development agenda. She reiterated that *“tackling child marriage is an obligation of governments and not civil society organizations”*.

Participants commended the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child for selecting the theme of **‘Eliminating harmful social and cultural practices: Our collective responsibility’** to mark the 2013 Day of the African Child which is celebrated on June 16th. They reiterated the urgent need for African governments to demonstrate leadership in tackling the problem of child marriage. Most African governments are parties to key regional and international treaties and conventions including the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), the Convention on the Rights of the

¹ UNFPA, 2012

² The conference was organised jointly by the Foundation for Women's Health Research and Development (FORWARD), Children's Dignity Forum (CDF) and the Tanzania Ending Child Marriage Network (TECMN) with support from The Sigrid Rausing Trust, The Graça Machel Trust and UNFPA Tanzania.

Child and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa - that condemn the practice of child marriage. The African Committee of Experts is called here to support governments to fulfill these obligations and strengthen accountability for girls. Participants will be able to offer technical support to the Expert Committee in developing this General Comment.

Call for Action

With this Call for Action we urge the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child to take active measures to develop a General Comment on Child Marriage, based on Article 21(2) of the ACRWC, which will provide guidance to governments and policy makers in Africa to protect children from child marriages, including relevant standards for effective monitoring. This General Comment will also provide a framework to enable Civil Society Organizations (CSO) to engage with governments. In the development of the General Comment on Child Marriage, we suggest that the Committee of Experts consider the following recommendations to the Africa Union member states:

- Enact a minimum age for marriage of 18 years for all males and females and ensure effective enforcement of these laws and standardization of all civil laws where they conflict with customary and religious laws
- Put in place mechanisms that makes the existing legislation workable: legislation relating to child marriage and the rights of children in general, including the development of national action plans
- Develop and implement transformative social policies which include communities, and traditional and religious leaders as central stakeholders. Which also recognize children and child-led initiatives as key players in mitigating child marriage
- Promote comprehensive and integrated programmes that take into account the drivers of child marriages such as social norms, value systems including religion, bride price, gender inequalities, and poverty
- Mitigate against the consequences of child marriage, including establishing initiatives such as re-entry of affected girls into schools, skill training and addressing the multiple needs of child brides, child mothers, child widows and their children
- Invest in evidence, data collection analysis of progress in ending child marriage
- To allocate adequate human and financial resources to strengthen the capacity of key actors
- To ensure effective partnership with CSOs and key actors who are engaged in addressing child marriage in Africa.

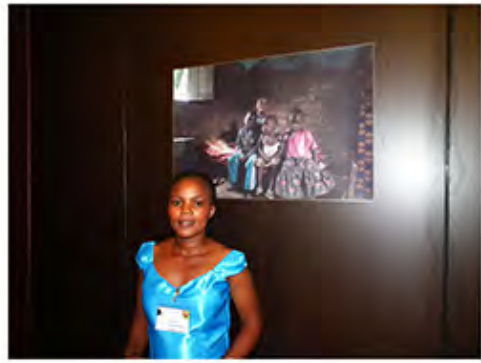
This Call for Action is led by the organizers of the conference, Children's Dignity Forum, FORWARD and the Tanzania End Child Marriage Network and endorsed by the organizations and stakeholders named below who attended the East Africa Conference on Child Marriage from 12-13th June 2013 in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania. The contact details of the focal point is Naana Otoo-Oyortey, Executive Director of FORWARD- naana@forwarduk.org.uk

This Call for Action is endorsed by the following:

Children’s Dignity Forum (CDF); Coexist Initiative; Foundation for Women’s Health Research and Development (FORWARD); Girls not Brides-the Global Partnership to End Child Marriage; Graca Machel Trust; Hope Foundation; Legal and Human Rights Centre; MIFUMI; Tanzania End Child Marriage Network Member (made up of 20 organisations); Tanzania Association of Media Women; Tanzania Women Lawyers Association; The African Child Policy Forum (ACPF); Population Council; Raising Voices; UMATI; UNFPA, UNESCO Tanzania; Utu Mwanamke; The Government of Zambia



Participants at the conference 12th June 2013, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania















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