



GIRLS NOT BRIDES

The Global Partnership
to End Child Marriage



BUDGET ADVOCACY TO END CHILD MARRIAGE AND PROMOTE GIRLS' EDUCATION IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

Learning report from eight pilot projects

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PICTURED ON COVER: Follow up activity with the Femmes Lumières who took part in the project in Niger. Photo: CCNEJ

ABSTRACT

Sustainable child marriage^a interventions require long-term financing of gender, education and child protection policies.^b Sustainable financing models require an enabling political environment and strong systems of accountability. Such models have already emerged as a priority in the gender and child protection policy agendas, while budget advocacy has lifted the political profile of child marriage.^c

Budget advocacy for domestic resource mobilisation could be one of the most efficient approaches to promoting national government ownership of work on child marriage and girls' education, and a valuable opportunity for civil society organisations (CSOs). However, lack of knowledge of budgeting processes and efforts to end child marriage in West and Central Africa indicate a need to learn from CSOs' work in practice.

CSOs are well-placed to develop expertise on child marriage and girls' education, and also to engage with communities where child marriage prevalence is very high. However, they also face considerable challenges in advocating for their governments to shift resources towards the people who need them most, especially girls at risk of child marriage and girls who are – or have been – married (ever-married girls).

Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage considers CSOs – as individual organisations and as collectives – to be essential agents of change who should be at the centre of efforts to address child marriage. Through its engagement with child marriage coalitions across West and Central Africa, *Girls Not Brides* aims to strengthen budget analysis and advocacy to end child marriage. To this end, *Girls Not Brides* has supported eight CSOs to implement budget advocacy pilot projects, through a project funded by Education Out Loud.

This report shares learnings from the eight pilot projects, addressing knowledge gaps and contributing to the evidence base on budget advocacy to end child marriage and promote girls' education.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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This report also benefited from the expertise of colleagues working across different thematic areas at *Girls Not Brides*, including Emma Pearce, Mundia Situmbeko, Matilda Branson and Jacky Repila. It was written by Aïcha Awa Ba, Regional Research and Advocacy Consultant for the EOL project, *Girls Not Brides*.

^a In this report, we use the term “child marriage” to refer to all forms of child, early and forced marriage and unions where either party is below the age of 18.

^b ActionAid International, 2019, [Collect more – and more fairly?](#)

^c *Girls Not Brides*, 2020, [Civil society and budget advocacy to end child marriage: Six case studies](#).

ACRONYMS

AJDS	Association des Jeunes pour le Développement du Sourou
APDG	Association pour la Promotion et le Développement du Gulmu
CCNEJ	Cadre Consultatif Nigérien des Enfants et Jeunes
CFME-T	Coalition pour la Fin du Mariage des Enfants au Togo
CONAMEB	Nationale pour mettre Fin au Mariage des Enfants au Burkina Faso
CSO	Civil society organisation
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EOL	Education Out Loud
FEMAC	Fédération d'Exploitation Miniers Artisanaux
GBV	Gender-based violence
GFM ₃	Génération Femme du Troisième Millénaire
JAAD	Jeunesse Africaine et Action De Développement
PAI	Plan d'Investissement Annuel (Annual Investment Plan)
PDC	Plan de de Développement Communal (Communal Development Plan)
PDES	Plan de Développement Économique et Social (Economic and Social Development Plan)
RELUTET	Reseau de Lutte contre la Traite des Enfants au Togo
SIA Mali	Solidarité Internationale pour l'Afrique.

CONTEXT

In 2021, *Girls Not Brides* – alongside member organisations in West Africa – began implementing the “Strengthening collective action to end child marriage, keep girls in school and advance gender equality in West Africa” project. The project is funded by the Global Partnership for Education, as part of the Education Out Loud (EOL) initiative. It includes national activities in Niger and Burkina Faso, with a regional focus on French-speaking West Africa.

The project addresses the interrelated issues of child marriage and girls' lack of access to quality education. Its overall objective is to galvanise CSOs and actors working on education and child marriage in West Africa and globally, create a pool of learning and strengthen collective advocacy for the implementation of laws, policies and programmes that improve girls' access to and retention in quality education, and contribute to ending child marriage.

Within this framework, *Girls Not Brides* selected and invested in eight CSOs and collectives in Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, Niger and Togo, supporting them to implement budget analysis and advocacy pilot projects. This selection was based on the CSOs' types of advocacies, targeting, profile (youth or women-led) and geographical location to ensure diversity.

METHODOLOGY, ETHICS AND LIMITATIONS

Table 1: Civil society collectives implementing budget advocacy pilot projects

CSO or organisation	Country and locality	Budget advocacy theme
AJDS – Association des Jeunes pour le Développement du Sourou	Burkina Faso – Province du Sourou	Budget advocacy project to end child marriage in the commune of Tougan
CCNEJ – Cadre Consultatif Nigérien des Enfants et Jeunes	Niger – Tillabéry	Contribute to the creation of protective environments conducive to girls’ wellbeing through their education and their retention in school
CFME – T Coalition pour la Fin du Mariage des Enfants au Togo	Togo – Communes de Lavié et Kouma	Contribute to ending child marriage in the communes of Lavié and Kouma through its inclusion in the Plan de Développement Communal (communal development plans; PDC), communal planning and budgets
CONAMEB – Coalition Nationale contre le Mariage des Enfants au Burkina Faso	Burkina Faso – Ouagadougou	Strengthen the capacity of 25 coalition members on budget analysis and advocacy, and conduct budget advocacy at the institutional level to promote the end of child marriage
FEMAC – Fédération d’Exploitation Miniers Artisanaux	Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) – Goma	Encourage budget decision-makers to take ownership of improving the education of at-risk girls by increasing the budget allocated to the education sector
GFM₃ – Génération Femmes du Troisième Millénaire	Côte d’Ivoire, Tonkpi Region	Contribute to the development of shelters for 100 girl survivors of gender-based violence (GBV), married girl survivors of domestic of violence, and student girls with no tutors, in the Tonkpi Region
JAAD – Jeunesse Africaine et Actions de Développement	Niger – Niamey	Contribute to the increase of budget allocation for children and women to effectively address child marriage
SIA Mali – Solidarité Internationale pour l’Afrique	Mali	Strengthen child protection in Mali through budget advocacy to end child marriage

Methodology of the learning report

This learning report was developed based on a review of findings from the budget advocacy pilot projects developed and implemented as part of *Girls Not Brides* project "Strengthening collective action to end child marriage, keep girls in school and advance gender equality in West Africa". Key findings and lessons learned were identified through an in-depth analysis of:

1. Literature around budget advocacy to end child marriage and child marriage and girls' education in West Africa.
2. Narrative reports produced by the eight CSOs receiving financial support from *Girls Not Brides* and other monitoring and evaluation materials sharing key results from their budget advocacy pilot projects.
3. Key informant interviews and informal conversations with the participating CSOs.
4. Images and other material generated through the budget advocacy pilot projects.

Methodology of the budget advocacy pilot projects

The CSOs were selected for financial support following a competitive application process amongst *Girls Not Brides* member organisations and particularly the *Girls Not Brides* budget advocacy network. Selection criteria included:

- **Geographical criterion:** Only CSOs or coalitions located in French-speaking West and Central Africa were selected. Some CSOs operating in rural or otherwise poorly connected areas were also selected to favour a more targeted approach.
- **Type of advocacy:** Only CSOs or coalitions that proposed budget advocacy focusing on ending child marriage and/or the promotion of girls' education were selected.
- **Budget advocacy focus:** CSOs or coalitions adopting a targeted approach in their budget advocacy were given priority. Given the short timeline (three months) available to implement the pilot projects, CSOs or coalitions that decided to work on a specific budget document or enhance the capacities of a strategic actor were prioritised. The idea was to implement pilots with measurable and timely impact.
- **Profile of CSOs:** Inclusivity was an important criterion and the selection process stressed guaranteeing the representation of youth- and women-led organisations. Three of the eight organisations selected are youth-led and four were women-led.

Following the orientation of *Girls Not Brides*' budget advocacy network team and in order to respect the project ownership by participating CSOs, *Girls Not Brides* only intervened in the design and implementation of budget advocacy pilot projects in a limited way. *Girls Not Brides* instead opted for a model of continuous capacity enhancement, from design to implementation of the pilot projects.

The EOL Regional Research and Advocacy Consultant conducted a series of capacity enhancement sessions including 1) an introduction to budget analysis, 2) an exploration of a budget analysis case study, and 3) training on budget analysis methodology. In addition, the Consultant conducted personalised support sessions at the request of CSOs during both the design and implementation phases.



PICTURED: The mayor of the municipality of Kloto 2 (Lavié, right) and the RELUTET coordinator at the opening of a meeting with local elected officials in Lavié, Togo. Photo: CFME-T

Limits

As further discussed in lesson 6, armed conflicts and political instability affecting West and Central Africa severely impacted on CSOs' advocacy for fairer budget allocations to policies to end child marriage. Three organisations had to interrupt project implementation or follow up because of political and security crises.

Burkina Faso has been in a permanent state of transition over recent months, with two political coups in 2022 – the first in January and the second in September. The capital city of Ouagadougou, where all institutions are located, suffered severe disruptions and CONAMEB had to suspend planned activities and could not implement their budget advocacy workshop until early December 2022.

In Mali, continuous attacks have threatened civil society activism since 2012. In the municipality of Sanando, members of SIA Mali were attacked and abducted. After their release, SIA Mali were determined to continue the activities they had begun. They reinforced their awareness-raising efforts by targeting the communities that are put at risk by rising extremism and threats to girls' rights to education in the region.

In Democratic Republic of the Congo, FEMAC completed their budget advocacy pilot project, but the end of their project coincided with an intensification of armed conflicts and massacres in the North-Kivu Region. FEMAC have faced significant security threats and were not able to contribute to the follow up in the post-project phase.

LESSONS LEARNED

Lesson 1: On using budget advocacy to consolidate the government's position as a legitimate leader to end child marriage and promote girls' education

Under prioritization of efforts to address child marriage in the political agenda inevitably leads to the underfunding of policies that contribute to ending child marriage. Stronger commitment and ownership by national and local governments in funding and policy implementation is known to have transformative potential for child marriage and girls'

education interventions in West Africa. Government – acting at all levels from local to national – has a comparative advantage in convening key stakeholders to address child marriage.

Given the short timeline for this project, budget advocacy led by CSOs through this project could not always produce tangible or immediate results, but local government leaders involved in the pilots have recognised the need to include child marriage and girls' education in local development plans. Budget advocacy has also created a sense of accountability among decision-makers, who had previously failed to build a favourable policy framework to address child marriage and promote girls' education.

In Togo, CFME-T organised training with 30 officials from the communes of Lavié and Kouma. A municipal councillor in Kouma thanked "[...]CFME-Togo for this meeting, which allowed us to have notions on child marriage, children's rights and especially on our role as municipal councillors to make our plans based on evidence. For my part, I understood that the CFME-T woke us up to scientific planning. We admit that the municipality does not yet have a PDC. We will ensure that this and that our planning documents take into account this marriage issue that we continue to ignore."

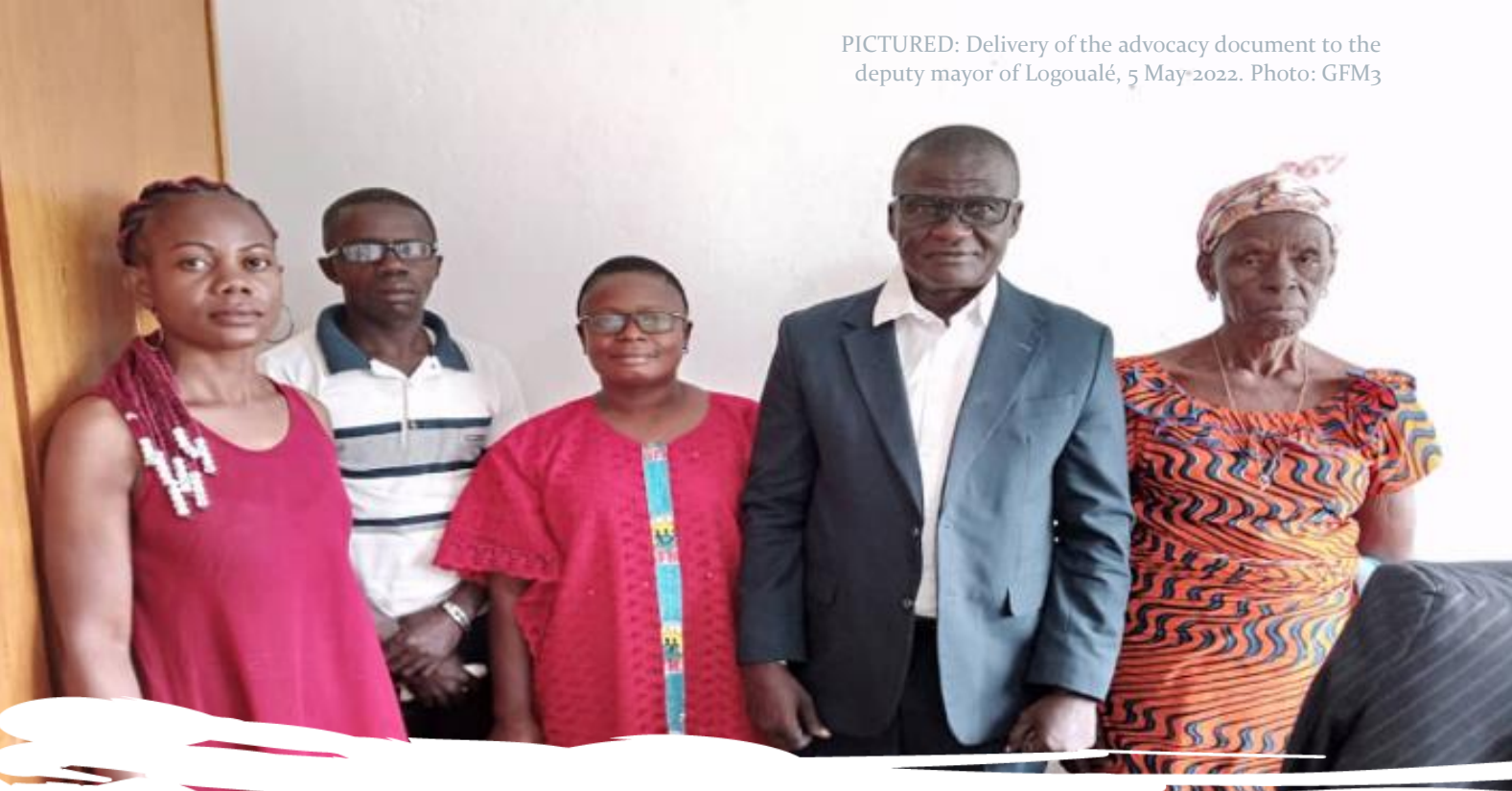
In Burkina Faso, advocacy by AJDS led decision-makers to understand the urgency of incorporating budgets to end child marriage in the PDC and the Plan d'Investissement Annuel (Annual Investment Plan; PAI). As a result, the municipal council immediately donated a plot of land for the construction of a listening and guidance centre for girls on sexual and reproductive health and rights.

In Côte d'Ivoire, advocacy by GFM₃ resulted in the Ministry of Family, Women and Children, through the Regional Directorate for the Family, Women and Children, committing to expanding the mandate of the shelter for survivors of GBV, le Centre Communautaire d'Accueil et de Rehabilitation pour les Femmes et les Filles (CECAREF), to support at-risk girls to stay in school.

In Burkina Faso, CONAMEB implemented a budget advocacy workshop with regional authorities, focused on keeping girls in school and ending child marriage in Eastern Region. CONAMEB – and the pilot implementing partner, APDG – strategically selected the Eastern Region as it ranked second lowest in the country for gender parity in secondary education. The workshop was chaired by the Governor of the Eastern Region and in his speech, the Governor's representative invited community leaders and other local and regional authorities to play their part in allocating substantial resources to create a safe environment for girls to stay in school.

Lesson 2: On increasing visibility and raising the political profile of child marriage and girls' education by leveraging CSO expertise and capacity enhancement

CSOs have been particularly active in producing budget advocacy tools and projects to encourage the government to allocate domestic resources more equitably to child rights and gender issues. Where possible, CSOs targeted strategic policy documents and institutions to ensure the integration of child marriage and girls' education. They also engaged in capacity enhancement on budget analysis and advocacy – for their own members or for government partners, community actors and girls.



In Niger, JAAD organised a parliamentary and governmental advocacy day bringing together 30 women and 10 men members of parliament. They also organised a participatory training workshop with 20 members of parliament to 1) review all public policy documents that integrate actions to end child marriage, and 2) offer introductory training on budget advocacy to end child marriage. They also participated in the drafting of the 2022–2026 Plan de Développement Économique et Social (Economic and Social Development Plan; PDES), which is the national framework for state and development partner interventions. This represented an opportunity for JAAD to advocate for strong gender mainstreaming. However, it is difficult to assess the tangible outcome of their advocacy to include gender-related issues in the PDES.

The budget advocacy pilot projects built participating CSOs legitimacy and credibility to engage with decision-makers. In Goma, Democratic Republic of the Congo, FEMAC argues that the projects significantly facilitated access to administrative and budgetary authorities, which would otherwise have been much more complex.

In Niger, the youth-led CCNEJ observed that decision-makers gradually demonstrated greater open-mindedness towards girls' education as they increased their knowledge and handling of the issue through the advocacy process. According to CCNEJ, they were then more willing to contribute to advocacy for greater budget allocation for girls' access and retention in school. CCNEJ's strategy consisted of building on prior government policy efforts to promote girls' education by popularising and enhancing capacity around the Decree of 5 December on girls' enrolment and retention in school until age 16. They organised a training series involving young people, women, and traditional and religious leaders to improve their knowledge of the Decree and girls' education in general.

In Burkina Faso, AJDS organised a specific workshop to analyse the PDC and the PAI to identify gaps and opportunities to incorporate budget lines that contribute to ending child marriage in Sourou. The budget advocacy pilot project also allowed AJDS to raise awareness around their complaint and reporting mechanisms.



Lesson 3: On fostering community participation in budget advocacy and ownership of solutions

Participating CSOs capitalised on their longstanding collaboration with community leaders, encouraging them to renew their commitment and support sustainable domestic resource mobilisation to end child marriage and promote girls' education. Community mobilisation through budget advocacy also aimed to democratise citizen control of public action and budgets. The budget advocacy pilots resulted in an immediate increase in public awareness of citizens' power to demand government accountability in actions and investments to end child marriage and promote girls' education.

In Togo, the CFME-T mobilised community leaders around budget advocacy to end child marriage and girls' education. Traditional leaders recognised the importance of their role at the forefront of the mobilisation. At the end of the training, the Canton Chief of Kouma declared: *"I have often participated in training sessions, but I have never been convinced. However, I really liked this one because the approach really reflects the problems we are experiencing. It responds to the realities of our environment and encourages us to commit to seeking solutions ourselves. As the chief of the canton, I must raise awareness among dignitaries and plan meetings with the municipality on the [end child marriage] issue."*

In Côte d'Ivoire, budget advocacy efforts led by the GFM₃ also aimed to address the insufficiency and informality of citizen participation in budgetary processes. They observe that in the context of decentralisation, participatory budgeting is increasingly debated, and resources should be allocated to operationalise it.

In Burkina Faso, AJDS placed community advocacy at the centre of its budget advocacy by targeting the behaviour change among at least 40 local elected officials and 100 community leaders in favour of ending child marriage. Their budget advocacy activities also included the recording and broadcasting of 110 messages in radio micro programmes in French, San and Dioula. AJDS got this activity covered by the Tougan municipal budget, and secured commitments from over 100 community leaders that they would not be involved in child marriage in any way.

Strong budget advocacy to end child marriage should involve girls in a meaningful way. AJDS dedicated specific activities to enhance girls' capacities around the legal framework and work to address child marriage: 30 girls' club members committed to serving as mediators in their communities and schools.

Also in Burkina Faso, CONAMEB used the budget advocacy workshop to create an intersectional platform for key stakeholders to come together and participate in their advocacy. The workshop implemented in Fada N'gouma, Eastern Region, brought together 66 girls, regional authorities, presidents of special delegations, chairs of economic and financial affairs committees, special delegations of defence and security forces, media and CSO members of CONAMEB.

To ensure community outreach and promote citizen participation in budget processes, CONAMEB's pilot project included the live broadcasting of the budget advocacy workshop on the local radio station Taanba de Fada. Another radio station Tin Tua de Fada provided coverage in national languages. Television coverage was provided by RTB Fada. The budget advocacy workshop also helped raise community awareness around GBV reporting mechanisms, like child protection hotlines.

Lesson 4: On advancing decentralised budgeting to end child marriage and promote girls' education

The existence of budget lines in PDCs is a prerequisite for funding and implementing activities to end child marriage and promote girls' education. However, the participating CSOs found that PDCs do not integrate child marriage and are very evasive on the promotion and retention of girls' education.

In general, in the West African Economic and Monetary Union budget configuration, sector ministry budgets should take into account the priorities reported by decentralised institutions (e.g., child protection regional departments). At the national level, the budget fails to reflect the needs expressed by the regional directorates because the decentralised budget is not integrated into finance laws. Budgetary concerns at the decentralised level are expressed through two major documents: the Regional Development Plan and the Communal Development Plan (PDC). Thus, integrating budget lines to end child marriage and promote girls' education into these plans is an opportunity to define specific and contextualised needs and get them funded and implemented.

In addition to the challenges around access to budget information, the legibility of budget information is also a major obstacle. Budgeted activities around ending child marriage are more often included in budget lines for education, sexual and reproductive health and rights, or girls' and women's economic empowerment. Analysis of communal and departmental budgets does not show explicit budget lines directly relating to child marriage. The availability and accessibility of documents for budget analysis is an ongoing challenge – some municipalities have not yet completed their development plans and only made limited budget extracts available for analysis.

Despite the mobilisation of decentralised institutional actors, the sustainability of initiatives that contribute to ending child marriage is hampered by a lack of funding from central government. CSOs responded to the lack of precision in decentralised budgeting and policy documents by advocating for local authorities to shift resources towards programmes and activities that have a direct and measurable impact on child marriage and girls' education.

In Togo, the CFME-T applauds local authorities for providing school equipment, birth attendants for health centres, and for facilitating the issuing of civil acts, especially birth certificates. However, they highlight the lack of explicitness around child marriage in key

policy documents like the communal development plan and the municipal budget, where the "social protection" budget line is assumed to cover child marriage, but the lack of clarity negatively impacts policies to end child marriage.

CFME-T has worked in close collaboration with the mayors of Kouma and Lavié who have strengthened their commitment to amending communal development plans. However, both mayors faced difficulties in modifying the nomenclature and adding a child protection budget line at the level of the Ministry of Territorial Administration, Decentralisation and Territorial Development.

In Burkina Faso's Province of Sourou, AJDS identified a major policy gap: the total absence of budget lines to address child marriage in the PDC and PAI. The focus of their budget advocacy was therefore to get local authorities to include a budget line for preventing child marriage in the commune and in the Province of Sourou, which has eight communes. They targeted their budget advocacy to the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralisation through the Tougan Municipal Council.

AJDS's analysis reveals that even for budget lines that are supposed to cover basic social services, budget allocations go to constructing infrastructure around schools, health and drinking water. By investigating the nature and destination of budget allocations, AJDS knows more about the quality of budget allocation and can leverage their technical expertise to push decision-makers towards investing in activities that contribute to ending child marriage. They organised a meeting with stakeholders and conducted fact-finding visits and advocacy activities to strengthen their case.

Lesson 5: On promoting evidence uptake from budget analysis to drive evidence-based advocacy

The CSOs that dedicated time and resources to a well-rounded upstream budget analysis were able to engage in targeted budget advocacy. Most of them also invested in enhancing the capacities of relevant actors, particularly local decision-makers.

One of the major gaps in budget advocacy to end child marriage is the almost non-existent coordination between relevant sectors. In Togo, the CFME-T highlights the fact that CSOs limit their budget advocacy to their own sector, with insufficient consultation and

PICTURED: Advocacy workshop for girls' club members. Photo: AJDS



coordination between the relevant sectors (education, protection, sexual and reproductive health and rights).

Another major learning is that budget advocacy needs to be timely. CSOs should be well-informed of the policy calendar and budget cycle to strategically plan their budget advocacy to promote fairer resource allocation for gender, protection and education policies. Implementation of the budget advocacy pilot projects was not planned in line with the national budget calendar, limiting their impact.

In Democratic Republic of the Congo, FEMAC conducted its budget advocacy after the adoption of the 2022 finance law. They did get elected officials to commit to integrating a budget line on child marriage and girls' education in the 2023 finance law, but the security crisis could rapidly reverse budget priorities going forwards. In Côte d'Ivoire, GFM₃ also found that it is difficult to amend current budgets, and that community advocacy to change practices and public policies is a lengthy process, particularly at the decentralised level.

In Togo, CFME-T's budget advocacy was limited by the limited availability and accessibility of documents for budget analysis, as municipalities had not completed their development plans and only made some budget extracts available for analysis.

Lesson 6: On the need to rethink budget advocacy to end child marriage and promote girls' education in crisis-affected settings

West and Central Africa has been impacted by various forms of protracted humanitarian crises. All over the region, CSOs' work to end child marriage and promote girls' education has been seriously hampered by political upheavals, violent armed conflicts, natural disasters, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Budget advocacy to end child marriage in such contexts is more complex. In times of crisis, governments may direct resources and efforts towards military and security expenses rather than basic social services. Education, health and protection policies are often deprioritised, raising a crucial question: what to do when the target institutions for budget advocacy are in crisis? CSOs who initially intended to lobby certain institutions now face ministry turnover, transition governments or even a total lack of representatives.

Armed conflicts and other forms of humanitarian crisis tend to disrupt basic social services like education and sexual and reproductive health and rights. In the absence of education infrastructure and services, educational wastage – that is premature school leaving, and underperformance in education – has led to increased child marriage prevalence in conflict-affected regions, and has put communities at greater risk of extremism.

Six out of eight of the implementing CSOs are based in countries affected by severe security crises or political instability. In Niger, CCNEJ emphasises the difficulty of conducting budget advocacy in the context of limits to communal resources, growing insecurity, school closures, displacement and food insecurity. As explained in the section on limitations, three CSOs were severely hampered by crises during project implementation and follow-up. Investments are needed to conduct risk assessments and develop mitigation strategies to sustain CSOs' budget advocacy work, even in times of crisis.

CASE STUDY

Youth-led organisations to break the glass ceiling of budget advocacy to end child marriage and promote girls' education – The case of the Association des Jeunes pour le Développement du Sourou (AJDS) in Burkina Faso

Youth-led budget advocacy to end child marriage and promote girls' education can have a transformative impact. When youth-led organisations have sophisticated tools and can access decision-makers, they become legitimate and credible actors in the budget advocacy process.

According to AJDS, the budget advocacy pilot project added value in three key areas:

1. ***Strengthening the CSO's visibility with communities and public service actors including health, education and social protection stakeholders.*** All these key stakeholders now request the technical support of AJDS on advocacy and other issues like nutrition.
2. ***Raising public awareness around AJDS's case reporting mechanisms and making it accessible to communities.*** AJDS supported community leaders to understand that the reporting mechanism is confidential and one of the best ways to prevent child marriage. Since the project, three child marriages have been avoided through the reporting mechanism.
3. ***Building good collaboration with municipal representatives.***

Technical support to improve the quality of budget advocacy can significantly increase the likelihood of successful implementation.

Youth-led organisations identified the training and technical support offered by *Girls Not Brides* during project preparation and implementation as a key factor for success. Capacity enhancement in budget advocacy has supported AJDS to develop solid arguments to engage community leaders and the municipal council in the project. According to the AJDS coordinator, the technical support – including a thorough documentary review and increased knowledge of the budget advocacy methodology – provided a solid foundation on which to build their advocacy. Thanks to this support, they took the lead on child marriage and girls' education in the Tougan PAI and PDC analysis committee.

One of the AJDS coordinator's key learnings was: *“to succeed in advocacy, all actors need to be involved around the theme of advocacy. Thus, as part of our budget advocacy project, health, education and social protection actors, town hall actors, customary and religious leaders, women-led and youth-led CSOs were involved.”* He adds that all these stakeholders were instrumental in collecting relevant data on their experience and how advocacy could better serve them.

Budget advocacy as a transformative process

AJDS captured the immediate impact of their budget advocacy to end child marriage in the Province of Sourou. Community and religious leaders demonstrated a radical change of behaviour, as explained by the coordinator: “From now on, the imam of the great mosque of Tougan requests civil status documents to confirm the legal age of marriage of both brides and grooms [before celebrating a union].” AJDS also engaged 120 members of youth-led and women-led CSOs in efforts to prevent and address child marriage.

AJDS anticipated the long-term policy impact of its budget advocacy, getting all seven municipal councils in Sourou Province to incorporate budget lines to end child marriage in PAIs and PDCs. According to the AJDS coordinator, their greatest success was the approval of the municipal council to incorporate a budget line to prevent child marriage in the PAI draft for the 2023 initial budget. The municipality of Tougan also provided land for the construction of a listening and guidance centre for young girls to accompany survivors and prevent child marriage.

Following up on advocacy efforts is central to promoting sustainable impact. AJDS have integrated multiple activities into their advocacy plan, including the creation of a monitoring committee composed of 15 technical experts, municipal councillors, community leaders and AJDS members.

AJDS is committed to supporting the education of internally displaced girls of Tougan, and used the budget advocacy pilot project to raise awareness around the risk of child marriage to this group. They invested in enhancing girls’ capacity to mobilise around their own education.

CONCLUSION

In work to promote fairer public investments in gender, child protection or education in West and Central Africa, CSOs can be a counter force *and* a strategic ally for government. All over the region, CSOs have faced significant challenges in the preparation and implementation of national budgets, as tense economic, political and security situations mean economic and social development plans revolve around the prioritisation of needs.

Although the current political and humanitarian environments are not conducive to government accountability, CSOs have relentlessly worked to make girls’ rights to education and protection a priority. *Girls Not Brides*, together with partner CSOs, will continue to contribute to building opportunities for improved citizen participation in the fair financing of policies to address child marriage and promote girls’ education.