



WORKSHOP REPORT

Learning Event on Ending Child Marriages in Malawi
21-22 March 2019

Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare
The Bantwana Initiative of World Education, Inc.



LIST OF ACRONYMS

AFRIDEP	African Institute for Development Policy
CBO	Community Based Organization
CCPC	Community Child Protection Committees
CM	Child Marriage
CVSU	Child Victim Support Unit
ECM	Early Child Marriage
FEDOMA	Federation of Disability Organizations in Malawi
GENET	Girls Empowerment Network
GGI	Gender Governance Institute
MoEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
MoGCDSW	Ministry of Gender, Disability and Social Welfare
MoH	Ministry of Health
PEP	Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infections
WEI/B	The Bantwana Initiative of World Education Inc.
YACODO	Youth Active in Community Development Organisation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In March 2018, the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare (MoGCDSW) and the Bantwana Initiative of World Education, Inc. (WEI/Bantwana) partnered to organize and host a Learning Symposium under the theme **Addressing Child Marriage in Malawi**.

According to the Malawi Demographic and Health Survey, 47% of women in Malawi marry by the age of 18 and 13% marry by the age of 13. There is a disparity between the rural and urban areas. By 18 years, 60% of rural women are married compared with the 34% of urban women.

The MoGCDSW is mandated to coordinate efforts to end Child Marriage (CM) in Malawi. In line with this coordination role, the MoGCDSW, with support from partners, launched the National Strategy on Ending Child Marriage (2018-2023) to provide a framework for interventions aimed at reducing the prevalence of child marriage in Malawi by 20% by 2023. Since the launch of the National Strategy, stakeholders have amplified interventions to end child marriage through prevention strategies, support services, and the creation of an enabling legal and policy environment to end child marriage at all levels.

Despite all these efforts, progress towards eliminating CM remains slow, with only modest improvements over the past few years.

The rationale behind organizing this symposium was that despite all of significant efforts by the Government of Malawi, stakeholders, and activists to combat child marriage, not enough progress was being made in reducing child marriage rates.

It is against this background that the MoGCDSW in collaboration with WEI/Bantwana organized the learning symposium with the following objectives:

1. Spark reflection and discussion among key stakeholders working to combat Child Marriages in Malawi;
2. Facilitate information sharing and collaboration between Child Marriages stakeholders in Malawi;
3. Identify gaps and challenges in policy, prevention and response mechanisms related to Child Marriages.

Held at Bingu Wa Mutharika International Conference Centre (BICC) in Lilongwe, the one and half day event brought together key stakeholders working to end child marriages in Malawi.

Months prior to the event, the MoGCDSW and WEI/Bantwana issued a call for proposals, requesting implementing partners working to combat child marriage to submit abstracts about their work that fell into one of three categories: 1) policy and legal framework; 2) prevention interventions; and 3) response interventions. Close to 50 abstracts were received and a panel comprised of technical experts from the MoGCDSW and WEI/Bantwana reviewed the proposals and selected the eight presentations that were highlighted in the learning symposium. The symposium stirred lively debate, reflection on what works and what doesn't work, and exchange of best practices.

This report captures and disseminates key take away points, summaries of presentations, and recommendations that emerged from the proceedings.

KEY TAKEAWAY POINTS – POLICY FRAMEWORK AND LEGAL ENVIRONMENT

1. The Government of Malawi is committed to taking actions and amending legal frameworks to combat child marriage.
 - a. National Strategy on Ending Child Marriage (2018-2023)
 - b. Amending the Constitution and raising the age of marriage from 16 to 18 (2017)
 - c. Marriage, Divorce, and Family Relations Act (2015) legislated 18 as the legal age of marriage
 - d. Gender Equality Act (2013)
 - e. Deceased Estates (Wills, Inheritance, and Protection) Act (2011)
 - f. Child Care, Protection, and Justice Act (2010)
 - g. Prevention of Domestic Violence Act (2006)
2. Challenges remain in the enforcement of these policies at the community level due to resistance to the law.
3. Laws remain at national level and are not accessible or understandable to grassroots community members; there is no grassroots dissemination strategy.
4. By-laws are a powerful legal tool but are often not aligned with formal laws and policies.
5. Need for harmonization of laws and policies.
6. Tackling child marriage is beyond the efforts of one single Ministry; rather it requires a multi-sectoral approach. For example, when children are being withdrawn from CM then need education support bursaries, girls hostels (MoEST), economic strengthening, sexual reproductive health services (MoH) – Ministry of Finance – a provision for a child marriage fund.

KEY TAKEAWAY POINTS - PREVENTION INTERVENTIONS

1. Prevention efforts tend to be general, leaving out vulnerable groups such as children with disabilities.
2. Simple awareness raising by sharing information that child marriage is illegal and harmful is not sufficient. Too often prevention efforts fail to enough to incorporate norms change approaches to address the underlying gender inequalities and power dynamics that perpetuate CM.
3. A common approach for prevention programs is to reach high numbers of individuals with “one off prevention messaging” because they are able to show to donors low cost per capita; however, this approach is superficial and does not address norms change. Norms change intervention requires multi-level approaches (individual, school, family, community) that are sustained over time.
4. Using “ # individuals reached with prevention messaging” as an indicator does not provide a good measure of the actual impact on changing individual attitudes or practices, nor does it address norms change.
5. There is a tendency to ignore available coordination structures for prevention. Too often stakeholders operate in silos.

KEY TAKEAWAY POINTS - RESPONSE INTERVENTIONS

1. Annuling child marriage and returning girls to their parents is often presented as the “end point” of projects. However, experience shows that girls who return home often have

trouble adjusting to life back at home or being back at school after being married. Support services for girls in these situations are needed.

2. Linkages to services is low, referral networks are weak, referral completion rates are not tracked.
3. Rescued girls are often also teen mothers and need parenting skills, families need support to deal with their returned daughter + grandchild.
4. Parents are often reluctant to take girls back after their marriage was annulled, especially when their child has a child. They do not realize that they have a legal responsibility, as spelled out under the Child Care, Protection, and Justice Act of 2010, to take responsibility for their daughters returning home.
5. There are insufficient numbers of programs addressing response mechanisms and providing services for survivors. There are numerous projects focusing on reaching high numbers with prevention messaging.
6. People tend to ignore available coordination structures for response mechanisms and referrals for services. Too often, service providers operate in silos.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

1. Create greater momentum for a multi-sectoral approach. The Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, The Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology should join forces with the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability, and Social Welfare.
2. Disseminate the *MoGCDSW Awareness Raising Handbook on Child and Gender Related Laws* widely at the grassroots level. This will ensure that by-laws will align more closely with national laws and policies.
3. Develop and rollout a training program for community leaders on how to apply national policies and laws at the grassroots level so that decisions of informal courts and by-laws will be in line with national policies and laws. This could be done in tandem with the dissemination of the *MoGCDSW Awareness Raising Handbook on Child and Gender Related Laws*.
4. Move away from short term prevention interventions that provide only “one-off messaging” and invest in longer term, more comprehensive programs that combine norms change approaches that address underlying gender norms and power dynamics with interventions to reduce socio-economic vulnerabilities of households.
5. Focus on comprehensive support services for girls after they are returned to their families.
6. Strengthen case management and referral networks so that girls can receive the full range of services.
7. Ensure that parenting skills/Early Childhood Stimulation is integrated in programming returned girls who are now teen mothers. Conduct training on parenting skills and ensure that parenting manual focuses on all stages of child development, including parenting skills for parents of adolescents that integrates content and sex education and talking to adolescents about sex.
8. Increase support for CVSUs so that they can improve their case resolution rates.
9. Accelerate efforts to harmonize policies and laws.

10. Increase financial allocation for interventions to provide services for victims of CM and promote accountability and transparency on resources that people are getting for CM issues. Work through relevant ministries to maximize on impact.

The report is organized as follows:

- **Section 1** highlights the key take away points and summaries of presentations related to the policy and legal framework.
- **Section 2** highlights the key take away points and summaries of presentations related to prevention efforts.
- **Section 3** highlight the key take away points and summaries of presentations related to response efforts.
- **Section 4** provides a summary of the outputs of the participant mapping exercise.
- **Section 5** presents the highlights of the panel on Government and donor priorities.
- **Section 6** synthesizes the recommendations that emerged from the learning symposium.

The learning symposium agenda, and the profiles and contact information of all the presenting organizations are included in the annexes to facilitate further dialogue, networking, and sharing.

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SECTION 1. POLICY FRAMEWORK AND LEGAL ENVIRONMENT

KEY TAKE AWAY POINTS

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6. Tackling child marriage is beyond the efforts of one single Ministry; rather it requires a multi-sectoral approach. For example, when children are being withdrawn from CM then need education support bursaries, girls hostels (MoEST), economic strengthening, sexual reproductive health services (MoH) – Ministry of Finance – a provision for a child marriage fund.

SUMMARY OF PRESENTATIONS - POLICY AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

THE CHILD MARRIAGE ENVIRONMENT IN MALAWI

CLAIRE JENSEN, *Africa Institute for Development Policy (AFRIDEP)*

Malawi has one of the highest rates of child marriages in the world and in the region currently. The effects of CM do not just end with the individual but affect the society as a whole.

In her presentation, Claire Jensen referred to the 2015-2016 Malawi demographic and health survey, which indicated that 47% of women were married by the age of 18 and 13%, were married by the age of 13.

Child marriage is a historic problem in Malawi although a small reduction has taken place in the last 5 - 6 years. There is a disparity between the rural and urban areas. Statistics show that by 18 years, 60% of rural women are married compared with the 34% of urban women.

The difference is also clear in geographical demarcations where the figures of CM are higher in the southern parts of Malawi as compared to the north. Education is another key factor contributing to the figures that are lower amongst girls with higher education exposure.

CM in Malawi has been fueled by harmful cultural practices that commodify children. This includes the use of girls as repayment for loans, the use of girls to gain cattle so that their brothers can marry, early sexualization of girls, and the act of forcing girls to get married once they fall pregnant.

CM is a violation of a child's rights to health, education, and freedom from violence, exploitation, and discrimination. It is also in conflict with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Human Rights, the Constitution of Malawi and various national and international legal frameworks.

In addition to that, Jensen shared that CM exposes girls to marital rape, domestic violence, and exploitation. These acts increase the risk of STIs, cervical cancer, obstetric fistulas and maternal death.

Ending child marriage is good for the individual, the community and the society and is good for development.

NATIONAL LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS ON ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE

HARRY SATUMBA, MINISTRY OF GENDER, CHILDREN, DISABILITY AND SOCIAL WELFARE

In this presentation, Harry Satumba shared the strides made by the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare in their efforts to combat CM using legal and policy frameworks.

Globally, when considering exceptions for the age of marriage with parental or judicial consent, close to 100 million girls are not effectively legally protected against child marriage in their country.

In Malawi, the prevalence is still high, at 42%, which is even higher than the regional average of 37% in Sub-Saharan Africa. CM does not only have a social impact but an economic one as well. Research indicates that if child marriage had ended in 2015, \$566 billion in purchasing power parity terms could have been added to the global economy by 2030.

Cumulatively, for the period from 2014 to 2030, welfare gains from ending child marriage could total more than \$4 trillion. Ending CM is, therefore, also crucial to the global economy.

By being party to a number of international treaties that promote women's and children's rights (e.g. CEDAW, CRC, Maputo protocol and being affiliated to international normative frameworks), Malawi committed itself to take urgent measures to prevent gender based violence by repealing and reforming harmful laws and social practices, which still subject women and girls to discrimination, and enacting new gender sensitive and responsive laws.



Satumba speaks to the audience on various National Legal and Policy Frameworks

In this regard, Malawi has managed to make progress in its legal frameworks by amending the Constitutional age of the child to 18 years. This raised the minimum age of marriage from 16 to 18 years. The Prevention of Domestic Violence Act (PDVA) 2006, the Deceased Estates (Wills, Inheritance and Protection) Act of 2011 and the Gender Equality Act of 2001 are also part of similar efforts to protect women and children by prohibiting harmful social or cultural practices, promoting the participation of women in all spheres of life, promoting reproductive health rights, education and training and enhancing dignity.

Satumba shared some challenges faced in implementing these laws and policies. These include resistance to implement the law, inadequate witness protection, awareness challenges, and commitments from other professions, system fragmentation and limitations in funding. All these and others continue to stand in the way of effective and efficient law and policy implementation.

LEGAL & POLICY FRAMEWORK ON ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE: WHAT WORKS, GAPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: AN IMPLEMENTER'S PERSPECTIVE.

TAWONGA KAYIRA, *Gender Governance Institute (GGI)*

This presentation was guided by the question “Why are our strategies and interventions as implementers not working?”

In her presentation, Tawonga Kayira shared that there are disjointed activities on ending child marriage in the country; hence, there is no comprehensive pool of data for decision makers to act upon to inform policy change or legal reform. This lack of coordination spreads as far as dissemination of important laws and policies that even implementers are uninformed. Poor service delivery, lack of formal courts, formal police/VSU, health centers and schools derail the efforts to end CM.

Informal courts have poor case handling processes, lack proper guidelines, do not receive training or updates on law and policy change and by-laws formulated by traditional leaders do not correspond to formal law, i.e. penalty for rape could be payment of a goat. It is hard to convict perpetrators with the absence of formal police units and victim support units. Survivors, therefore, cannot

report their cases and often cases remain unresolved.

Lack of formal health centers and schools hinders access to SRHR services resulting in teen pregnancies, STIs, access to PEP services after rape as well as access to education, all which fuel ECM. There is also poor response to child related issues by those entrusted with the power to have the interest of the child at heart.

To fight CM effectively with laws and policies, there is need for harmonization of these policies and this is beyond the efforts of one Ministry. Issues of child marriage cuts across several sectors, not only the Ministry of Gender but also the Ministry of Justice, Economic Planning and Development, Ministry of Education and several other sectors. It would also be paramount for laws and policies to trickle down to the grassroots level and for by-laws at community level to be a reflection of formal laws as a way of protecting children.

MEDIA RESPONSE AND CHILD MARRIAGES; CREATING A SPACE FOR REPORTING CHILD MARRIAGES IN THE MALAWI LOCAL MEDIA

DINGANI MITHI, *JournAIDS*

Child Marriage is undeniably a human rights issue and a recent report by Human Rights Watch on CM in Malawi highlighted the severity of the problem in Malawi. Malawi has one of the highest rates of CM in the world, ranking 8th among the top 20 countries that are considered to have the highest rates of CM. Data shows little to no change in child marriage prevalence since 2000. Child marriages are linked to gender based violence, unsafe abortions among adolescents and increased illiteracy.

Dingani Mithi pointed out that in as much as Malawi is a signatory to Child Rights Convention (CRC), progress on child marriage is still stalling. The media has an obligation to use their channels to report such issues as well as sensitize the public on the same. The media influences policy, shapes dialogue, uncovers and investigates human rights abuses in the form of child marriages. It also empowers people to act, demand their rights to hold leaders accountable and

provides a space for people to express their voice. Regrettably, as of 2019 Malawi still does not have a National Database on CM.

Since 2014, JournAIDS has used the Maputo Plan of Action on Sexual Reproductive Health & Rights (African Union Continental Policy Framework) as a guide in their work. They recognize need to empower adolescents in tackling child marriages, unsafe abortion and unwanted pregnancies.

In Malawi, they have trained 40 journalists and reached out to 30 CSOs in consultations. JournAIDS has determined that Malawi's response to CM is lagging behind due to low budgetary allocations and lack of resources in media houses to scale up reporting; uncoordinated responses from the media and CSO's, lack of community radio capacity to report on these issues, lack of a media guide for editors and reporters to use when reporting child rights issues; and no database to inform a strong media response.

SECTION 2. PREVENTION INTERVENTIONS

KEY TAKE AWAY POINTS

1. Prevention efforts tend to be general, leaving out vulnerable groups such as children with disabilities.
2. Simple awareness raising by sharing information that child marriage is illegal and harmful is not sufficient. Too often prevention efforts fail to enough to incorporate norms change approaches to address the underlying gender inequalities and power dynamics that perpetuate CM.
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SUMMARY OF PRESENTATIONS – PREVENTION INTERVENTIONS:

CARE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EXPERIENCES WITH THE YOUTH ON PREVENTING CHILD MARRIAGES

PATIENCE MWALE, CARE

CARE Malawi developed the Community Score Card (CSC) in 2002 as part of a project aimed at developing innovative and sustainable models to improve health services. Since then, the CSC has become an internationally recognized participatory governance approach for improving the implementation of quality services – spreading within CARE and beyond.

CSC is a participatory tool that uses the community as a unit of analysis. It generates information through focus group interaction and enables maximum participation of the local community. The CSC provides immediate feedback to service providers, emphasizes immediate response and joint decision-making, allows for mutual dialogue between users and providers followed by joint monitoring of Action Plans.



Mwale discusses the CSC with the participants

CARE's Community Score Card is a social accountability approach designed to engage community members, service providers, and local officials, to provide a framework for discussion and negotiation, and to develop specific actions to address issues identified.

The CSC consists of five phases: planning and preparation; conducting the score card with the community; conducting the score card with service providers; interface meeting and action planning; and action plan implementation and monitoring. The CSC process is iterative.

The CSC has since proven to enhance the following;

1. Builds engagement: from passivity to leadership
2. Agency: growing confidence and skills
3. Mutual accountability: from service users as well as service providers
4. Influencing: by co-creation not 'advocacy'
5. Broaden social change at scale
6. Supported adaptation by many organizations across sectors, implemented (15 countries globally)
7. Learning about informal systems to achieve change
8. Building new connections: listening, dialogue, openness and transparency

Like any other process, the CSC faces a lot of challenges which include barriers to change such as the lack of interest and motivation from policymakers, service users and providers not feeling free to talk, lack of engagement of stakeholders, high level decision makers and community members. There are also community members who have no confidence in CSC.

CARE recommends the CSC for use in various organizations in the efforts to combat CM. It can be used for evidence for service planning, community centered design, service delivery improvement, adaptive programming, community activism and engagement, social accountability and due diligence.

ENDING CHILD MARRIAGES AMONG GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES

GEORGE DENJA AND MALONJE PHIRI, Federation of Disability Organizations in Malawi (FEDOMA)

According to the 2008 Population and Household Census, Malawi has a population of 13.8 million, of which about 480 000 are persons with disabilities. This represents 4.18% of the total population. The prevalence of disability amongst children (0-18) is at 2.4%.

In their presentation, George Denja and Malonje Phiri stated that FEDOMA has used various strategies to fight CM including Lobbying and round table discussions, advocacy and awareness, media campaigns, provision of sign language interpreter services, linkages to psychosocial support, legal and health services, strategies used to fight Child Marriage, lobbying and roundtable discussions.

During their work, FEDOMA has established that Economic Deprivation plays a key role in CM increase. Families of female children with disabilities will sometimes opt to send the girl to an early marriage in exchange for financial comfort. This has pushed FEDOMA and Parents of Disabled Children Association of Malawi (PODCAM) to initiate income generation activities amongst parents of children with disabilities to enable them to take care of their girls with disabilities and keep them in school and avoid taking them to early child marriages.

School dropout among children with disabilities including girls with disabilities is rampant in many primary schools in Malawi due to uncondusive learning environment and teacher's lack of knowledge in handling learners with disabilities. FEDOMA in corroboration with Ministry of Education –



Denja educates the crowd on FEDOMA's efforts against ECM

Special Needs Education department offered in-service inclusive education training to regular teachers and modification of classrooms and sanitary facilities. Following the intervention, the number of children with disabilities including girls attending class increased and retention rate is encouraging. This has seen some girls with disabilities going as far as secondary school level.

FEDOMA also provided training to extension officers like Child protection officers and community rehabilitation officers on disability issues and work with communities to enable them in handling complex cases involving children with disabilities. This was due to cases where girls with disabilities were not assisted when they reported cases due to communication difficulties.

Harmful cultural practices and lack of parental care and guidance also continue to play a key role in fueling ECM among girls with disabilities. This requires increased awareness and sensitization to combat. Currently, Disabled Women in Development

(DIWODE) are championing the wellbeing of women and girls with disabilities. This grouping of women with disabilities has been carrying out advocacy on issues of Sexual and

Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). Their work has encouraged girls to remain in schools thus reducing early marriages among girls with disabilities.

SECTION 3. RESPONSE INTERVENTIONS

KEY TAKE AWAY POINTS

1. Annuling child marriage and returning girls to their parents is often presented as the “end point” of projects. However, experience shows that girls who return home often have trouble adjusting to life back at home or being back at school after being married. Support services for girls in these situations are needed.
2. Linkages to services is low, referral networks are weak, referral completion rates are not tracked.
3. Rescued girls are often also teen mothers and need parenting skills, families need support to deal with their returned daughter + grandchild.
4. Parents are often reluctant to take girls back after their marriage was annulled, especially when their child has a child. They do not realize that they have a legal responsibility, as spelled out under the Child Care, Protection, and Justice Act of 2010, to take responsibility for their daughters returning home.
5. There are insufficient numbers of programs addressing response mechanisms and providing services for survivors. There are numerous projects focusing on reaching high numbers with prevention messaging.
6. People tend to ignore available coordination structures for response mechanisms and referrals for services. Too often, service providers operate in silos.

SUMMARY OF PRESENTATIONS – RESPONSE INTERVENTIONS:

ENABLING GIRLS ADVANCE GENDER EQUITY (ENGAGE) PROJECT

TAKONDWA KALIWO AND STANELY NYIRENDA, *Gender Equality Network (GENET)*

Takondwa shared on a project being implemented by the Gender Equality Network in Phalombe and Thyolo in partnership with Rise Up, International Center for research on Women (ICRW), Youth Tech Health (YTH) and Youth Net and Counseling (YONECO). The project is also done as a research intervention thus everything is documented to make sure the interventions are producing the anticipated results. The project has three components; train 800 adolescent girls to raise their voices and advocate for an end to child marriage, develop the capacity of 36 civil society leaders to address root causes of child marriage, employ an innovative SMS and radio strategy to build community support to end child marriage

Through this intervention, they have identified girls as a key resource in ending child marriage. The Girl leaders are currently working with local structures to remove girls married below age of 18 and return them to school. They are connecting girls to legal support for sexual abuse and gender based violence, they have sensitized 5,000 girls in their communities through girl clubs to speak out against child marriage and they have successfully advocated for equal treatment for boys and girls when it comes to teenage pregnancy. Similarly, the intervention has sparked positive response from the CSO community.

There has been regular engagement and feedback between district council and CSO leaders in Thyolo, several advocacy projects focusing on ensuring inclusivity and proper implementation of bylaws to address child marriage and the re-admission of girls into school, two advocacy projects addressing sexual harassment and assault against girls and

close collaboration between CSO leaders and Girl leaders in advocacy efforts.

The project also established that engaging strategic male allies directly provides a good starting point for challenging cultural behaviors that lead to the violation of girls' rights. Through this, they established "Uncle/Niece Chats", Male CSO champions trained in girl-led advocacy and traditional leaders and boys training in SMS messaging about child marriage and girls' rights.

The project has registered the following success through the girls, CSO's, Radio and SMS interventions so far:

1. 773 adolescent girls trained to advocate for an end to child marriage as ENGAGE Girl Leaders
2. 5,000 girls mobilized in Thyolo and Phalombe to speak out for their rights
3. 4 girls in TA Changata involved in formulation of bylaws to protect girl's rights against child marriage
4. 36 CSO leaders trained in leadership and girl-centered advocacy
5. 14 CSO leaders implementing girl-centered advocacy to reduce child marriage
6. Thyolo District Girl Child Care, Protection and Justice 2016 by-law revised to include all girls in primary and secondary school
7. 370 traditional leaders and girls leaders creating roles and responsibilities to effectively implement child marriage bylaws
8. 11 head teachers commit to implement the re-admission policy
9. Almost 40 radio programs dedicated to issues of child marriage in Thyolo and Phalombe on YFM

- 10. Since February 2018, over 300 calls on YONECO's hotline to discuss issues of child marriage and refer 108 cases of child marriage to the police
- 11. Almost 100 text messages shared with girl leaders about child marriage and related issues, leading to over 45 calls made to YONECO hotline from text messages

Through this project, the ENGAGE project learnt that integrating local and district

leaders in project activities is vital to project success and challenging cultural norms that accelerate child marriage. Also, engaging girls as role models and working in partnership with them and CSO leaders positively impacts project outcomes.

YACODO'S EXPERIENCE WITH RESPONSE INTERVENTIONS TO CHILD MARRIAGE: COMMUNITY CHILD PROTECTION COMMITTEES

WILLY GAZLIN, *Youth Active in Community Development Organization (YACODO)*

Youth Active in Community Development Organisation (YACODO) with support from Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW) and Go Love Foundation is implementing a project in T/A Somba, Blantyre Rural under the name Building Community Competencies to Keep Girls in Primary School.

The aim of the project is to strengthen the community competencies towards sustaining girls in primary schools, create a conducive and protective environment for children and popularize the enacted child protection related laws for communities' action towards reducing incidences of child marriages

During his presentation, Willy Gazlin explained that in the first phase of this project, YACODO has managed to revamp 9 Community Child Protection Committees (CCPCs) so as to make them functional, the CCPCs have been trained and equipped with basic community counselling skills, the CCPCs ably handle and contain psychological pressure that many victims of child marriages have access to psycho-social support right within their communities and a total of 90 CCPC members have been trained hence ensuring the community access to psychosocial support and counselling services. So far, over 9 topics have been covered under the psychosocial trainings.

The CCPCs have used One on One Counseling Sessions with victims of child

Marriages and Group Counseling Sessions with victims and their immediate support community i.e parents and chiefs to try and lessen cases of CM and the effects of CM on the victims.

Through these trainings, YACODO followed up and withdrew a total of 21 Child Marriage cases. Among these cases 11 female victims

are back in school, 6 girls are pregnant waiting to get birth in their homes and planned to go back to school after giving birth; the rest have planned to return to the marriages as soon as they turn 18.

Various challenges have been encountered during the implementation of this project including;

- Acceptance by parents to allow female victims back home -once they become pregnant
- Lack of financial support from the victim households to rehabilitate the victims
- Difficulties in mind-set change more especially female victims
- Mobility problem by the CPCCs to follow-up on both reported CM cases and those withdrawn from CM
- Inadequate institutional capacity (resources) to reach wider communities since many chiefs are calling for the same to take place in their communities.

SECTION 4. PARTICIPATORY MAPPING

To further stimulate discussion, participants were asked to reflect on the following question:

“After all the policies, programs, interventions we have heard in the presentations; why is progress so slow?”

“What we need to do more of as stakeholders?”

“What we need to do less of as stakeholders?”

“What we need to change as stakeholders?”

Participants wrote their responses on cards and created a group “map” as shown in the photograph to the below. Responses were then grouped by thematic area and stirred a lively group discussion.



Meeting participants add their own responses to the reflection questions to the group map

THEMATIC AREA	RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PARTICIPANTS
A) ECONOMIC STRENGTHENING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have more household economic empowerment interventions • Provision of financial support in terms of school fees and materials • More financial muscle to monitor the lives of girls rescued from ECM
B) LAW ENFORCEMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening the law enforcement system on ending CM • Approach CM as a legal issue • Work hand in hand with law enforcers • Enforcer stiffer punishments for those fueling CM both at community and national level • Fight against corruption amongst chiefs • Take steps to avoid withdrawal of CM cases from courts
C) HARMFUL CULTURAL PRACTICES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empowering traditional leaders to champion the fight against ECM • Abolish cultural practices that fuel ECM • Address norms change • Changing norms requires programs to focus on girls and boys, women and men. Programs that focus only on girls and women will not change norms.
D) CONTEXTUALIZE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing tailor made interventions to fit different scenarios for effectiveness • Search deeper for the root cause of CM • Stop looking at CM as only a male fueled problem • Stop accusing girls of being the problem so they can be free to share experiences
E) TARGETING CAREGIVERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on all; boys, girls and parents as engines of change • Engage the community in the fight • Engaged fathers, uncles, and brothers in the fight against CM • Train parents so they can understand the importance of letting their children go to school
F) EMPOWER GIRLS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus more on women/girls empowerment strategies • Create safe spaces for the girl child to return to school • We need to have more projects that give girls a platform for their voices to be heard
G) MEDIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have more radio interventions • Create more documentaries • Encourage capacity building for local media houses • Launch a media fellowship on reporting child marriage • Policy makers need to engage more openly in dialogue with the media
H) COMMUNITY SENSITIZATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More of community sensitization and mobilization against CM • Create safe spaces within the community so the girl child can be protected • Start dialogue within the community to discuss dangers of CM and advocate against harmful cultural practices
I) LONG TERM STRATEGIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop programs built for sustainability • Project vs. programs. We need more programs than projects. You cannot end child marriage with one activity.

J) CAPACITY BUILDING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a national framework on the fight against CM • Build capacity at the grassroots level to combat CM • Enough national level meetings – need to focus efforts and funding on the grassroots level
K) ADVOCACY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize a National day/week or even month for the fight against ECM as is the case with GBV • Advocate for an empowered girl child and parent against CM
L) COLLABORATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt a multi-sectoral approach in the fight against CM • Come up with a multi stakeholder strategy • Share experiences and best practices • Stop working in isolation • Engage more partners in the provision of modes of transport i.e. bicycles, motor cycles, etc. so as to ease the problem of mobility.
M) POLICY AND LEGISLATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on implementing the standing policies and laws other than developing new ones • Develop a national program on ending CM that we can own and take more leadership of • Popularize relevant policies to the grassroots level • Stop signing treaties and developing strategies we can't commit resources to for implementation



Participants discuss responses to the reflection questions and group them by thematic area.

SECTION 5. GOVERNMENT AND GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

In this session, we heard from Justin Hamela representing Ministry of Gender, and Habiba Ousman representing UN Women who responded first to questions from the moderator and then questions from the participants on their views and perspectives on how to accelerate progress towards eliminating CM.



Justin Hamela and Habiba Ousman discuss the government priorities regarding child marriage in Malawi

Below are some of the highlights from the panel discussion.

1. What are your priorities for the next five years?

Justin: As Malawi we have reviewed the current state of CM and as we can see, we have the highest figures in the region and across. We need to work towards transcending the social norms fueling CM. We also need to find ways to keep children in school to access education. Though several things have been discussed during this event, these are highlighted.

Habiba: As the UN, our mandate is to compliment what the government is doing and will be doing. We support. We also work with CSOs. We support the policies government comes up with. We want to create an enabling legal environment.

2. Is there anything you just learnt today? Something you feel you didn't know?

Habiba: What has fascinated me from the process is the inclusion and participation of the youth voice. If we do not bring young people on the table we won't win the fight. It is exciting to see young people in the conversation.

3. *Building on the mapping exercise, what do you think we should be doing more of? Less of?*

Justin: There are so many dimensions affecting increase in CM. In some areas we are good, in some not. Some interventions have done well in other areas and others have not gone deep in some areas. There are a lot of issues to do with coordination; we are still working in isolation. We don't want to mix because we want visibility.

So many interventions have been tried out in Malawi. We try and go. We need to adopt these interventions as part of our programs and lobby government to take these on board for a longer time.

4. *What capacities/qualities are you looking for in local implementing partners?*

Habiba: As UN Women, we consider the mandate of the institution. Do they have expertise and experience in the field? UN women and Ministry of gender are working hand in hand because of their common mandate and objectives. The issue of coordination is key. Any organization that is working on women and gender issues has to answer to Ministry of Gender. We need to see organizations stick to their mandates. That shows dedication and stability.

5. *What do we do to support girls who don't leave marriage but want to self-advance?*

Habiba: That is a gap we need to scale up on. There is still work that needs to be done. We have local chiefs that have done well in rescuing these girls but indeed the question remains what next?

New programs are coming up that will offer scholarships to girls as an initiative to keep them in school. Let us work with all girls; those going back in school, those staying in marriages alike etc. It's a multi-sectoral approach. Let us start initiatives that will sustain the girls. Soon, we will have funding from Scottish government to enhance digital skills. This should also be a way to enhance their skills.

6. *We have talked a lot about the need to change behaviors and cultural norms, yet this takes time. Most programs are only funded for a few years which does not allow for comprehensive norms and behavior change. How do we ensure continuity and meaningful change in this funding environment?*

Justin: That has been a worrying element for a while. We see projects run for 6 months others 3 years. But the good thing is currently we are seeing more programs coming up i.e Tithetse nkhanza funded by DFID which is for about 6 years and the Spotlight Initiative. We need to lobby more for that type of arrangement. Its good news that Malawi has assumed a leadership role and issues of coordination are on the ground. Sustainability is key and to achieve this we urge for joint planning, joint resource mobilization and capacity building. We have also recommended use of CBOs in various programs. That ensures continuity of programs and builds CBOs capacity.

7. *How can the donor and Ministry play a role in coordinating a national response to CM?*

Hamela: The National Strategy on Ending Child Marriage is what will govern us from last year to 2023. We, as the Ministry of Gender have assumed a leadership role. We need to include coordination in our programs. We as stakeholders need to familiarize ourselves with various structures that government has in place against CM. Also, let me thank World Education/ Bantwana for this forum. We want this yearly. We have unexplored areas e.g the marriage and divorce act has good provisions that we should explore. Let us all explore these.

Habiba also took the initiative to share on the Spotlight Initiative, which she disclosed would address some of the concerns raised during the event. The Spotlight Initiative is an EU-UN multi-year initiative focused on eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls in 13 countries globally and eight countries in Africa, including Malawi. Concerns were raised by FEDOMA on whether people with disabilities had been considered in the initiative to come. In response, Habiba stated that one of the things we are working on is the SDGs and through this, the leave no one behind principle was at play. The national reference group is made up of individuals with experience. They should also be able to monitor that persons with disabilities benefit and that disability elements should be factored in.

8. Can children make decisions on marriage? This question stemmed from an earlier discussion..

Hamela: Referred to the Convention of the Rights of the Child which states that everything that we do should be in the interest of the child and that only those over 18 should enter marriage.

Habiba: Agreed with Hamela and said she felt Hamela had given the most logical and most important global accepted response and decision.

In their final remarks, Justin and Habiba pointed out the need for all our activities to be matched in our strategy with the pinned suggestions. Justin also emphasized the need for a study to be done on the ground to validate the figures of CM that are currently being used; this would help us to see what has been done from 2015 to date. Several countries have come to learn from Malawi that is an indication that we are doing something right. If we replicate the best practices that we see, we should definitely make progress.

SECTION 6. RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

1. Create greater momentum for a multi-sectoral approach. The Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, The Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology should join forces with the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability, and Social Welfare.
2. Disseminate the *MoGCDSW Awareness Raising Handbook on Child and Gender Related Laws* widely at the grassroots level. This will ensure that by-laws will align more closely with national laws and policies.
3. Develop and rollout a training program for community leaders on how to apply national policies and laws at the grassroots level so that decisions of informal courts and by-laws will be in line with national policies and laws. This could be done in tandem with the dissemination of the *MoGCDSW Awareness Raising Handbook on Child and Gender Related Laws*.
4. Move away from short term prevention interventions that provide only “one-off messaging” and invest in longer term, more comprehensive programs that combine norms change approaches that address undress underlying gender norms and power dynamics with interventions to reduce socio-economic vulnerabilities of households.
5. Focus on comprehensive support services for girls after they are returned to their families.
6. Strengthen case management and referral networks so that girls can receive the full range of services.
7. Ensure that parenting skills/Early Childhood Stimulation is integrated in programming returned girls who are now teen mothers. Conduct training on parenting skills and ensure that parenting manual focuses on all stages of child development, including parenting skills for parents of adolescents that integrates content and sex education and talking to adolescents about sex.
8. Increase support for CVSUs so that they can improve their case resolution rates.
9. Accelerate efforts to harmonize policies and laws.
10. Increase financial allocation for interventions to provide services for victims of CM and promote accountability and transparency on resources that people are getting for CM issues. Work through relevant ministries to maximize on impact.

ANNEX 1: AGENDA

LEARNING EVENT: ADDRESSING CHILD MARRIAGE IN MALAWI

Government of Malawi, Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability, and Social Welfare in partnership with the Bantwana Initiative of World Education, Inc.

March 21-22, 2019
BICC, Lilongwe

Objectives:

1. To spark reflection and discussion among key stakeholders working to combat Child Marriages in Malawi;
2. To facilitate information sharing and collaboration between Child Marriages stakeholders in Malawi; and
3. To identify gaps and challenges in policy, prevention, and response mechanisms related to Child Marriages.

THURSDAY MARCH 21, 2019

Time	Session	Presenter/Facilitator
12.00	Registration and mapping of organizations' interventions	
12.30	Lunch and Gallery Walk	
1.30	Welcome, introductions, and objectives of the day	Mbonisi Tshuma, World Education
2.00	Opening remarks	Chief Director, Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare
2.15	The CM environment in Malawi	Claire Jensen, AFIDEP
2.30	The Legal and policy Framework	Presentations by: The Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare Panel response by Dingaan Mithi, JournAIDS CGI
3.30	Coffee break and Gallery Walk	
3.45	Ending Child Marriage in Malawi in 10 years: What works	Claire Jensen, AFIDEP
4.00	Prevention Interventions	Presentations by: Patience Mwale, CARE CSSRED George Denja and Malonge Phiri, FEDOMA
5.00	End of day	

FRIDAY MARCH 22, 2019

Time	Session	Presenter/Facilitator
8.30	Welcome Tea	
9.00	Response Interventions	Presentations by: Stanley Nyirenda and Takondwa Kaliwo, Engage/GENET Willy Gazlin, YACODO
10.15	Participatory mapping of gaps in interventions	Naomi Reich, World Education
10.30	Coffee Break	
10.45	Reflections on participatory mapping	Naomi Reich, World Education
11.00	Donors Panel on Child Marriage Priorities for Malawi	Donor Community
12.00	Consolidation of recommendations from participants	Naomi Reich, World Education
12.15	Closing remarks	Mbonisi Tshuma, World Education Representative from participants
12.30	Lunch and end of day	

ANNEX 2: PRESENTER PROFILES AND CONTACT INFORMATION

The Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability, and Social Welfare

The Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability, and Social Welfare is mandated to promote gender equality and protect the welfare of Malawian women, men, girls and boys with special focus on persons with disabilities and older persons to become self-reliant and active participants and beneficiaries of the national socio-economic development agenda. The vision is to see socially, economically and politically empowered women, men, girls and boys with equal opportunities and integration for persons with disabilities and the elderly. The Ministry's mission is to promote social economic empowerment and protection of women, men and children, persons with disabilities and the elderly using community and welfare approaches. the Ministry, with support from partners, launched the National Strategy on Ending Child Marriage (2018 -2023) to provide a framework for interventions aimed at reducing the prevalence of child marriage in Malawi by 20% by 2023.

Presenters:

Trevor Justin Hamela, Child Affairs, email: hamelatrevor@gmail.com

Harry Satumba, Child Affairs, email: hsatumba@gmail.com

The Bantwana Initiative of World Education, Inc.

Founded in 1951, World Education, Inc. (WEI) is a non-profit organization that has catalyzed social change at the community level through programs that link education to health, economic, social, and civic development. WEI is dedicated to improving the lives of the poor through an array of community development and capacity building initiatives and works in over 25 countries throughout Africa, Asia, and the United States. In 2006, WEI launched the Bantwana Initiative to specifically address the needs of orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) affected by HIV and poverty. WEI/Bantwana develops and delivers comprehensive and family-centered health, protection, education, economic strengthening, and psychosocial support services to vulnerable children and youth to build resilience and mitigate the compounding effects of HIV and poverty.

Our models incorporate evidence-based practices and bring together civil society and local government for meaningful sustainability and reach. Through WEI/Bantwana's programming, more than 375,000 OVC families and 80,000 at-risk adolescents are receiving critical services annually across Eswatini, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Uganda, Zimbabwe, and Zambia.

Presenters: Mbonisi Tshuma, email: mbonisi_tshuma@mw.worlded.org

AFRIDEP

The African Institute for Development Policy (AFIDEP) is an African-led, regional non-profit policy think tank that aims to bridge gaps between research, policy and practice in development efforts in Africa. We seek to contribute to sustainable development in Africa by using evidence to inform the design and implementation of intervention programmes and strengthen governance and accountability structures.

AFIDEP has significant experience working in the area of CM and adolescent pregnancy in Malawi, as well as gender-based violence (GBV) more broadly. In October 2017, AFIDEP supported the MoGCDSW to hold a policy dialogue to strengthen ongoing efforts to end CM in Malawi for which staff synthesised evidence to prepare a policy brief and fact sheet. At this meeting, the Ministry committed to ending child marriages by 2027. AFIDEP is undertaking a study, at the request of the MoGCDSW, examining the causes of and interventions to prevent teenage pregnancy. AFIDEP staff are also conducting an analysis of GBV policy in Malawi.

Presenters: Claire Jensen, email: Claire.jensen@adridep.org

CARE

CARE is a global leader within a worldwide movement dedicated to ending poverty known everywhere for their unshakeable commitment to the dignity of people. CARE works around the globe to save lives, defeat poverty and achieve social justice. They seek a world of hope, tolerance and social justice, where poverty has been overcome and all people live with dignity and security. CARE has put women and girls in the center because we know that we cannot overcome poverty until all people have equal rights and opportunities. Since 1946 CARE has turned donor gifts into life-changing programs around the world. In Malawi, CARE is recognized as an implementer of gender transformative development and humanitarian programming in multiple domains including adolescent girls and women's economic empowerment by building agency and structures.

Presenter: Patience Mwale, email: patience.mgolimwale@care.org

FEDOMA

The Federation of Disability Organizations in Malawi (FEDOMA) was founded in 1999, as an umbrella organization of Disabled Persons with Organizations (DPOs) affiliates with the aim of providing a unified voice for all persons with disabilities. Currently, FEDOMA has 12 affiliate organizations

The mission of FEDOMA is to enhance the welfare of persons with disabilities and enable them play their rightful roles in society. FEDOMA's founding objectives include;

- To promote and advocate for the rights of people with disabilities.
- To advocate for and monitor the equalization of opportunities for people with disabilities as stipulated in the United Nation's Standard Rules.
- To coordinate and strengthen the capacity of the affiliated DPOs

FEDOMA as an umbrella organization is respected and consulted by both the Government and NGOs on issues that relate to disability.

Presenter: George Denja, email: George.denja@gmail.com

Gender Governance Institute (GGI)

Gender Governance Institute (GGI) has expertise in planning, designing and implementing projects on Child Marriage (CM). These have mainly focused on Prevention Mechanism, Response Mechanism and improving the legal and policy environment. This paper is based on several projects it has been affiliated with. It will focus on the gaps that still exist, what has worked, what hasn't and makes suggestions on innovative strategies to be considered. Innovative key strategies adopted have included targeting traditional and religious leaders, strengthening community child protection structures, community empowerment on child rights, laws and policies, gender and life skills, promoting coordination between the district council and communities and advocating for improved services.

GGI has worked with traditional and religious leaders (TRLs) to ensure that issues of CM are included in their by-laws. However, there is lack of awareness on formal laws and policies resulting in poor ruling of cases. TRLs should be provided with all legal documents and trained on the same. Child protection structures like Child Protection Committees, community Victim Support Units and Court User Committees have been strengthened however, lack of near-by services like one stop centres, formal police units, health centres and formal courts have resulted into increased number of offenders as few convictions are made.

Presenters: Tawonga Kayira, Girl Child Network, tawongakayira@yahoo.co.uk

GENET

Girls Empowerment Network (Malawi) is a local young women's rights organization and a grassroots movement of girls and young women that works to support and improve the wellbeing of vulnerable and marginalized girls in Malawi. GENET was formed in 2008 and registered as NGO in September 2008. GENET empowers girls and young women to advocate for gender equality and justice. GENET envision a world where empowered girls and young women are free to exercise their rights and live peacefully in a just, humane and equitable society. The mission driving GENET (Malawi) is the commitment to contributing towards elimination of gender inequalities in health, education and economic opportunities, and work to fight against gender based violence, harmful traditional practices and HIV/Aids through promotion and creation of safe spaces for girl's participation and development. GENET believes that encouraging the leadership of girls and women, their participation and the development of their status benefits the entire community.

GENET Malawi works to strengthen and amplify young women's voices by empowering girls and young women to be advocates of their own rights and be able to claim their rights from duty bearers. The organization was formed in 2008 by young Malawian women and operate through forming girl's networks and uses various approaches such as communication and networking, workshops and training, lobbying and advocacy within the framework of social behaviour change models. GENET (Malawi) uses the multi-stakeholder/interface dialogue and action approach in confronting negative stereotypes and challenges related to the attainment of gender justice.

Presenter: Takondwa Kaliwo, email: takondwatk@gmail.com

JournAIDS

Journalists Association Against AIDS (JournAIDS) with support from the Southern Africa Sexual Reproductive Health Trust (SRHR Trust) has been working on child marriages and supporting the implementation of the Maputo Plan of Action on SRHR since 2014. In our work, the organization has been lobbying for a harmonized and well-funded national action plan on ending child marriages, we have also examined the school readmission policy.

JournAIDS develops messages, provides training to journalists and facilitates thematic discussions on HIV/AIDS, gender-based violence and women's rights.

Presenters: Dingaan Mithi, email: jaaidsmalawi@gmail.com

YACODO

Youth Active in Community Development Organisation (YACODO) with support from Go. Go Love Foundation is implementing a project entitled "Building Community Competencies to Keep Girls in Primary School" in T/A Somba aiming at strengthening the community competencies towards sustaining girls in primary schools, create a conducive and protective environment for children, popularise the enacted child protection related laws for communities action towards reducing incidences of child marriages and primary school dropout among girls hence ensure empowered girls; actively participating in their own protection and becoming role models to their fellow girls within their localities. This project is also being premised on championing the prevention of girls dropping out of primary schools and getting into child marriages as a proactive approach rather than reacting to the cases of child marriages and school dropout among girls.

Presenter: Willy Gazlin, YACODO, youthactiveincommunity@gmail.com