

The Role of Parliamentarians in Ending Child Marriage

Capacity Building Seminar for African Parliamentarians on Addressing Child, Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM)

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Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage

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Honourable Members of Parliament

Ambassador Christopher Thornley

Honourable Hanna Tetteh, Minister of Foreign Affairs

Representatives of UNICEF and UNFPA

The Parliamentarians for Global Action Secretariat

Honourable Nana Lithur, Minister of Gender, Children and Social Protection

Representatives of the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection

Members of Girls Not Brides Ghana National Partnership

Ladies and gentlemen

All protocols observed

Ladies and gentlemen, let me start off by introducing Girls Not Brides

What is *Girls Not Brides*?

Girls Not Brides is a global partnership to end child marriage. It was founded by *The Elders* and launched in 2011. There are over 550 members from over 75 countries. Raising awareness, building partnerships, increasing evidence base, call for laws, policies and programmes addressing child marriage is part of the essential work of the Partnership.

Within the theory of change for Girls Not Brides, there are four outcomes that are necessary to bring about lasting impact. These include the empowerment of girls; collaborating with families and communities; provision of social services such as health and education; and have laws and policies reflect regional and international standards on ending child marriage.

Allow me to delve into the important toolkit that Girls Not Brides has prepared for Parliamentarians on ending child marriage.

***Girls Not Brides* Toolkit**

Ladies and gentlemen, *The Role of Parliamentarians in Ending Child Marriage* is the toolkit by *Girls Not Brides*. It contains essential information and advice for Parliamentarians. These include the following:

- Definition of child, early and forced marriage and global prevalence;
- Drivers and impact of child marriage;
- Child marriage and the law;
- The role of Members of Parliament in ending child marriage;
- What can parliamentarians do?

Ladies and gentlemen, it is essential to understand the prevalence of child marriage.

Prevalence of Child Marriage

Over 720 million women alive today were married before they reached the age of 18 years. This accounts for nearly 10% world's population. Child marriage is widespread in West and Central Africa (42%) as well as in East and Southern Africa (37%).

Another way of looking at it, ladies and gentlemen, is that 40% of the girls in Sub-Saharan Africa are married as children. This accounts for two in every five girls, which is astounding.

Specifically, for the countries represented in this seminar UNICEF's State of the World's Children 2015 provided the following figures: Ghana 21%; Kenya 26%, Mozambique 48%, Sierra Leone 44%, United Republic of Tanzania 37%, and Zimbabwe 31%,

Drivers and Impact of Child Marriage

Ladies and gentlemen, the main drivers that cause child marriage. Traditional culture and religion is one. Another is gender roles where girls are not valued as much as boys or even seen as a burden. Poverty is yet another driver and some parents see bride price or dowry as a welcome income. Insecurity can cause parents to marry off their girls, thinking that marriage protects their girls from being at risk of sexual and physical assault. The lack of legislative framework or enforcement of laws such as the minimum of age of marriage being 18 is another driver.

Ladies and gentlemen, the impact of child marriage cannot be underscored. Child marriage is linked to poverty. It also undermines the child's right to education. Gender inequality is exacerbated by this practice. Maternal, new born and child health is undermined due to adolescent pregnancies thus endangering the life of both the mother and new born child.

Child Marriage and the Law

Child marriage infringes on the human rights of the child as enshrined by regional and international instruments such as the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, including the Protocol on Women's Rights (Maputo Protocol). Clear legislation establishing 18 as the minimum age of marriage is essential.

Now let us get to the crux of the matter, what is your role as Members of Parliament?

The Role of Parliamentarians

Parliamentarians are responsible for legislation, policy oversight and budget approval. They can also place child marriage at the top of the political agenda. Specific roles for Parliamentarians include:

- Leadership in policy formation, development and implementation of policies in consultation with civil society organisations.
- Harmonise international and regional legal instruments with national legislation.

- Ensure that the government develops a national strategy on child marriage and corresponding action plan which is clearly monitored, evaluated and reported.
- Allocate budgets to end child marriage through various ministries such as gender, health, education, judiciary and interior as well as follow-up on accountable expenditure and reporting.
- Build partnerships with civil society organisations in addressing child marriage.
- Represent different constituencies including the voices of women, youth and girls.

What can parliamentarians do?

Girls Not Brides' toolkit outlines specific actions that members of parliament can do. These include taking action such as organising Parliamentary Hearings in the relevant committees, discuss and influence budget allocations, meet with CSOs, dialogue with local authorities, build your capacity and knowledge, and raise awareness.

Be accountable by reporting back to colleagues and parliamentary committees. Demand accountability from ministries and other stakeholders as well as state party reporting to regional instruments such as the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the child. Call for implementation of target 5.3 of Sustainable Development Goals.

How can *Girls Not Brides* support Parliamentarians?

First, *Girls Not Brides* can connect parliamentarians to member organisations in your respective country. The toolkit is available on line for more ideas and can be found here: "[The Role of Parliamentarians in Ending Child Marriage](#)". Engage with The Africa Union Campaign on Child Marriage which is organising a training for Traditional Leaders and Parliamentarians in October 2016. Finally, Members of Parliament can become champions on ending CEFM at the national and regional levels including ECOWAS, EAC and SADC (e.g. SADC Model Law on CM)

As I conclude, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to leave you with food for thought in terms of your suggestions of solutions for the following constraints and barriers:

1. The legal framework on marriage is not aligned to the definition of a child.
2. Most of the marriages occur under customary or religious law, not statutory law.
3. There is poor registration of births and marriages.
4. The age of marriage varies amongst various religions.
5. Rural areas have the highest prevalence of child marriage, yet law enforcement is difficult.
6. Children have a difficult time pursuing cases in court on child marriage and lack the resources or knowledge of the system.

Thank you for your attention, ladies and gentlemen and I welcome your comments and questions.