Child, Early and Forced Marriage

A MALAWIAN PERSPECTIVE

BY

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MALAWI: BRIEF PROFILE

Malawi lies in the Southern East of Africa bordering Mozambique, Zambia and Tanzania. It is within SADC region.

Population: 16 Million people.

Attained its independence from the British on 6th July, 1964.


1994 First Democratic Elections.
Child Marriages in Malawi

Statistics:
Malawi one of the countries with highest rates of child marriages in the world-UNFPA Report
Malawi ranks 9th in Africa, and 10th in the world with teenage marriages-UNICEF recent Survey
50% of girl children in Malawi are married before the age of 18
Malawi is number 8 out of 20 of the countries with highest teenage marriages
2/3 of the population of Malawi comprises of people of under 25 years
The Problem

Poverty, social and cultural factors in Malawi hamper girls’ access to education—
Human Rights Watch

Hence our girls are more vulnerable to harmful cultural practices (chinamwali), child marriages, teenage pregnancies and higher risk of mortality

Most girls are forced into early marriages due to pressure from their poor families
The Problem - Cont
Between 2010 and 2013 nearly 30 000 girls in Primary School, and 4000 in Secondary School dropped out due to early marriages.
At same period, 14 000 in primary school and 5000 secondary school girls dropped out due to pregnancy.
Dropouts figures contribute to already high illiterate levels.
Women at 57% 
Men 74%
Harsh reality-early marriages do drain Malawi of its innovation and potential that could enable it to strive.
Child Marriage:
Deprives girls of education-
disempowered and remain dependent
on their husbands
Undermines girls self-confidence and
self-identity- prevented from
participating in all aspects of life
Exposes girls to physical and emotional
abuses by their husbands
Leads girls to early parentage and
higher risks of maternal mortality
arsh Realities of Child Marriage in Malawi- Cont

Is a risk factor in the transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases
Deprives girls of every conceivable human right to life---health, education, human dignity and development

Is a guarantee to poverty in Malawi—worsens poverty, illiteracy, preventable maternal deaths
Contributes to maternal mortality----currently at 675 deaths per 100 000 live births
Progress so far

The complex mix of cultural and economic factors means that there is no single, simple solution to Child Marriage

We can end child marriage through:

- Long term programming
- A willingness to learn from our successes and failures
- Sound partnerships
- Campaigns
- Stand by traditional leaders
- Role played by Churches
- Law
- Parliament
Key Campaigns in Malawi

Girl Not Bride Campaign-Global will to end Child marriage
Let Girls Lead sponsored by Girls Empowerment Network GENET Malawi
End Child Marriage Campaign
Back to School Campaign
Girls-Child Campaign
He and She Campaign
et Girls Lead Campaign-GENET

funded by Girls Empowerment Network GENET

Empowers girls to fight for their own rights

trained 200 girls to be advocates in Chiradzulu District- Southern Region of Malawi

These advocates lobbied 60 village chiefs to pass by-laws

-Laws that protect adolescent girls from early marriages, and

-harmful sexual initiations

alties:

-man who marries a girl under 21 is summoned:

-To give up piece of land

-To pay a fee of seven goats to the chief

-parents get social sanctions:

-Three months of mandatory janitorial service in the local health clinic
Traditional Leaders and their role in eliminating child Marriages in Malawi

Ministry of Gender crafted By-Laws for Chiefs

These by-laws prohibited Child Marriages, teenage pregnancy, school dropouts

Chiefs reinforce these laws by penalizing offenders

By-Laws penalize traditional leaders or parents who authorize marriage of a girl younger than 21 years of age

Senior Chief Chitera boats:

“The chiefs are penalized by paying seven goats to me, while parents who authorize their children into marriage are fined to pay three chickens to their village heads, and a goat to me, their Traditional Authority”
hiefs’ Success Stories

According to Senior Chief Chitera, there has been no reports of Child Marriages since the adoption of By-Laws in 2012

Senior Chief Kachindamoto of Dedza District (Female) led the crusade against Child Marriages She annulled 330 teenage marriages in June, 2015

Paramount Chief Kiyungu of karonga and Chitipa in the Northern Malawi put a gallant fight against Child Marriages and dangerous cultural initiations
Churches and their role

Main churches in Malawi have taken serious measures to end teenage marriages.

The clergy and laity have been sensitized about the evils of officiating Child Marriages.

Catholics, Presbyterians (CCAP), Seventh Day Adventists and many more took stand:

- Not to officiate unions involving any under 21 years old.
- Couples’ ages to be verified with state machineries before formal blessing.

Church’s stand reduced the prevalence of Child Marriages and consequently teenage pregnancies.
The Marriage Law in Malawi

This law was passed by Malawi Parliament in February, 2015

Assented to by State President Prof. Peter Mutharika in April, 2015

Law increased marriage age from 15 to 18 years

The enactment is a first real attempt to protecting girl child in Malawi

The law is a serious attempt by government of addressing gender issues deeply rooted in cultural norms and traditions

The law is a result of many stakeholders’ efforts
The impact of Marriage Law

Stakeholders taking lead in disseminating and enforcing the law

Since the enactment of the law, 600,000 girls were rescued—January 2016 Report, Ministry of Gender

The annulment affected 1.2 million

Girls and boys returned to school
Role of Parliamentarians

Parliamentarians- key players in ending Child Marriage
three spheres in which MPs can influence the change:

Policies that deal with Child Marriage are brought by the executive to parliament for consideration and enactment. Parliamentarians engage stakeholders to have a common understanding of the depth of Child marriages, and other gender related issues. Parliament try to influence policy through proposed bills. As an oversight role, parliament put specific questions to ministers to explain actions which affect the policy on Child Marriage.
Role of Parliamentarians

Parliamentary committees

- Social and Community Affairs Committee is mandated to oversee government policies that affect children and child marriages in Malawi
- Women Caucus-brings together all female MPs
- All female MPS sit in this caucus and assist scrutinize legislations and their impacts on women and children
- Played a critical role in the enactment of Marriage Bill
- Female MPs in the caucus ensure that resources are allocated to ministries and departments that fight against Child Marriage
Role of Parliamentarians

International presentation

- Malawi Parliament- a member of various International Parliamentary organizations-SADC (PF), CPA, IPU, PGA, PAN-AFRICAN etc
- MPs attend annual conferences, seminars, representing Malawi Parliament
- Through international forums, MPs share best practices on how to provide leadership and oversight on key social problems such as Child Marriages
- MPs contribute on how to fight against Child Marriage
- They also learn from other countries approach and experiences on the issue
Emerging Challenges

After passing on the Marriage Law and its enforcement, many girls are saved from bondages. Some girls with babies want to go back to school but who will mind their children?? Parents are that poor to take care of these babies.

Government, through ministry of Gender, are shortlisting such families on Social Cash Transfer program.

How about a girl whose parents cannot afford to send her back to school?? Government, NGOs and other bodies are trying to respond to such challenge.