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Child Marriages in Shamva District of Zimbabwe

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Child Marriages in Shamva District of Zimbabwe

Jeffrey Kurebwa [α] & Nyasha Kurebwa [σ]

Abstract- Child marriage has far-reaching health, social, economic, and political implications for the girl and her community. It truncates a girl's childhood, creates grave physical and psychological health risks, and robs her of internationally recognised human rights. Ending child marriage requires the consent of all actors involved such as fathers, government, Non Governmental Organisations, religious, community, and tribal leaders. Qualitative methodology was used in the study. Purposive sampling and snow ball sampling were used to identify key informants and women who were victims of child marriages. Ending child marriage requires a multifaceted approach focused on the girls, their families, the community, and the government. Culturally appropriate programs that provide families and communities with education and reproductive health services can help stop child marriage, early pregnancies, and illness and death in young mothers and their children.

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I. Introduction

Globally more than 700 million women alive today were married before the age of 18. More than one in three (about 250 million) entered into marriage before the age of 15 (UNICEF, 2014). Boys are also married as children, but girls are the most affected. Child marriage is a manifestation of gender inequality in society and reflects social norms that perpetuate discrimination against girls. The practice of child marriages is most common in South Asia and Southern Africa with ten countries with the highest rates found in these two continents (UNICEF, 2010). According to a UNICEF (2014) report, over 280 million girls alive today are at risk of becoming brides by the time they turn 18 if there are no efforts to reduce child marriage. This figure is likely to rise to 320 million by 2050 due to population growth. The total number of women married in child hood will grow from more than 700 million to approximately 950 million by 2030 and nearly 1, 2 billion by 2050. The number of girls under the age of 18 married each year will grow from 15 million to 16.5 million in 2030 to over 18 million in 2050 (UNICEF, 2014). A UNICEF report (2014) indicated that in Sub-Saharan Africa 39 percent of girls are married before the age of 18 while 31 percent of girls in Zimbabwe are married before the age of 18 putting the country among four southern African countries with the highest rates of girl child marriages. Child marriage predominantly affects girls who live in rural areas. Girls from poorest 20 percent of the households are more than four times likely to be married before the age of 18 than girls from the richest 20 percent of the households (UNICEF, 2016). A UNICEF (2015) report indicated that child marriages in Mashonal and Central province recorded 50 percent, Mashonaland West 42 percent, Mashona land East 36 percent, Midlands 31 percent, Manic land 30 percent and Bulawayo 10 percent.

In July 2015, the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) unanimously adopted a resolution to "eliminate child, early and forced marriages." The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) specifically includes the elimination of child marriage as one of its targets (5.3) within the broader goal of gender equality. International organisations and NGOs have invested in developing interventions that raise awareness about the negative consequences of child marriage, provide parents with incentives to postpone marriage for their children, and provide adolescents with new opportunities to acquire skills and alternatives to a traditional path of early marriage and early motherhood.

Despite the various international, continental, regional, and domestic legislations that prohibit child marriages, the practice is still rampant in rural Zimbabwe. A variety of reasons that include, poverty, protection of girls, fear of loss of virginity before marriage and related family honour, and the provision of stability during unstable social periods, lack of education, and discriminatory customary and religious norms are suggested as significant factors in determining a girl's risk of becoming married as a child (International Humanist and Ethical Union, 2007). All these reasons have a major impact on why this practice remains a constant international issue for women and girls. Examining the framework in which child marriage exists, including the causes and effects of the practice is important in assisting countries to institute and enforce meaningful laws and policies to eradicate child marriages.

a) *Purpose of the Study*

This study focuses on the context, causes, and effects of child marriages in Madziva Community in Mashonal and Central province of Zimbabwe.

II. Research Methodology

Qualitative research methodology was used in this study. It was suitable for this study as it managed to capture a myriad of perspectives on child marriage in Madziva community of Mashonaland Central province of

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Zimbabwe. A case study design was adopted in order to produce a detailed analysis of the context, causes, effects and measures to reduce child marriages. The case study design was central to this research as it allowed the researcher to be actively involved with experts and women who had experienced child marriages. Madziva community was chosen because of its high prevalence in child marriages especially among the apostolic sects. A sample of 15 respondents was used in this study. Purposive sampling and snow ball sampling were used in identifying key informants. Respondents were drawn from Village Headmen; Zimbabwe Republic Police Victim Friendly Unit; Child Care Workers (CCW) from the Department of Social Services; Gender Focal Person from the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Gender and Community Development; Field Officer from a local NGO; members of the Johane Masowe Wechishanu Apostolic Church and the Apostolic Empowerment Trust; women who had experienced child marriages and child brides. Secondary sources included the various international, continental and domestic legislations on child marriages and previous researches on child marriages.

III. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

This study is premised on the Gender Role theory by Connell (1987). The fundamental concept of the Gender role theory are the two different genders-male or a female. Men and women are taught about the meaning of their roles, accepted and unaccepted behaviour. Women are mainly viewed as submissive instead of being contributory. They are rewarded when acting according to their social roles while punishment is imposed for unacceptable behaviour. The theory refers to five different aims, namely;

(i) Analysing and differentiating the *person* and the societal *position attained*- Both women and men are socially entitled different positions in society. The position socially accepted for girls within the areas categorised by child marriage is simply being a mother and wife.

(ii) The actions allotted to the position- The child bride's primary task is taking care of the household in activities such as farming, cleaning, cooking and taking care of the children. Working outside the household is rarely a choice for the wife, but is often the duty of the husband who has to earn an income. Therefore, the girl tends to be very dependent on her husband for financial support. The girl is either the only wife or is in a polygamous marriage. Discontinuing school and caring for the household is also the norm for the girl. When the first menstruation sets in, the girl's sexuality is safeguarded and school is therefore usually not an option. The married child often experience loss of power over resources which are instead held by the husband. Divorcing from the husband is very difficult for the girl child due to disempowerment and societal norms and values.

(iii) The proper and anticipated behaviour accepted by society- The appropriate behaviour for a wife in a traditional household is fulfilling all the tasks expected. The wife is to be the 'other' one in contrast to her husband. She is expected to be fertile and give birth to a large number of children who will care for the parents when they grow older. The proper behaviour is to stay married to one husband and keep maintaining the current family traditions. These traditions are often of high importance to live by and are therefore prioritised by the community.

(iv) Involving people set in contrast- In this case, the people in contrast are the male and the female, husband and wife. In most cases the wife is often very younger than her husband. This often causes the disempowered wife to be dependent on her husband.

Becoming a child bride usually has no package. Heavy responsibilities come along with being a young mother and wife. This can be very difficult for the girl who is put into adulthood before being emotionally or physically ready (Connell, 1987).

a) Understanding of Child Marriage

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989) defines child marriage as marriage of a child under the age of 18. According to Parrot and Cummings (2008) a child marriage is a form of forced marriage. The two authors argue that children lack the maturity to understand the nature of marital relationships, what is expected of them and the ways in which child marriage affects them. They further argue that forced marriage is strongly associated with child marriage because full and informed consent is absent or considered unnecessary when it comes to the marriage. Parrot and Cummings (2008) differentiate forced marriage from arranged marriage by indicating that forced marriages involve coercion, mental and emotional abuse and strong social pressure. The two scholars further allude that in most extreme cases child marriage may also involve physical violence, abduction, false imprisonment, rape or sexual abuse and murder. UNICEF (2001) is more specific by defining child marriage as a formal marriage or informal union before the age of 18 that occurs throughout the world.

Mibang and Behera (2006) argues that the basic purpose of marriage is for procreation of children, continuation of society, fulfilment of biological needs and development of social ties among members of society. They define marriage as a union of man and woman to establish a family which is the basic unit of a society. Throughout the world, marriage is regarded as

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a moment of celebration and a milestone in adult life. However, in child marriage practices there is no reason for celebration. The imposition of a marriage partner upon a child means that a girl or boy's childhood is cut short and their fundamental rights are compromised.

Child marriage is one of the most destructive demonstrations of inequality and power imbalance between women and men (UNICEF, 2014). In most African countries, child marriage was regarded as a mechanism to protect girls from unwanted sexual advances and safeguarding their economic well-being. However, child marriage undercuts the very basis of what it was established to achieve, and generally results in a life of sexual and economic servitude for the girl (UNICEF, 2015). The devaluation and suppression of women's rights underpin the practice of child marriage and lead to serious psycho-social, economic and health consequences for the girl, her family and the society. Goody (1990) in his study of marriage patterns across the world highlighted a number of reasons why young girls are preferred for marriage in traditional societies. These include a longer period of fertility, obedience and docility. Such qualities are necessary for the bride to learn and accept the rules and ways of her new household. Child marriage is a form of oppression, and it perpetuates an inter-generational cycle of poverty and absence of opportunities. The child bride has a very limited support system due to her lack of education and isolation from her peers. She has few skills, limited mobility and constrained in her capacity to overcome poverty for herself, her children, and her family. Societies that tolerate and support the practice of child marriage thwart social and economic development (UNICEF, 2007).

According to UNICEF (2001), the practice of child marriage varies depending on a society's view of the family in terms of its role, structure, pattern of life, and the individual and collective responsibilities of its members. Ebenhoh (2004) explains that the idea of what constitutes a family and its function varies according to a country's social group. He argues that in most developed countries marriage takes place later in life because men and women marry as adults with experience of life and therefore a parental choice of a spouse is easily accepted. The practice of child marriage is furthered because many countries do not have a dependable system for registering births and marriages. This creates a further barrier to the enforcement of the legal age for marriage. Without a birth certificate, a child has no defence against age-related rights abuses such as child marriage. Unregistered marriages diminish a girl's capacity to use the legal system as a means of escaping the marriage she entered into as a child (Ebenhoh, 2004).

IV. Instruments and Legislations on Child Marriages

International, continental, regional and domestic instruments and legislations affirm child marriage as a violation of human rights. These instruments and legislations lay the norms to be applied to marriage. They cover issues of age, consent, equality within marriage, and personal and property rights of women. Some of these key instruments are analysed below.

a) *Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989)*

Every provision of the CRC is of some relevance to the issue of child marriage. The most pertinent provisions relates to the definition of a child as any human being below the age of eighteen years (Article 1); the best interests of the child as a primary consideration in all actions concerning the child (Article 3); the right to express his or her views freely (Article 12); the right to protection from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury, abuse, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse (Article 19); and the right to health and to access to health services; and to be protected from harmful traditional practices (Article 24).

b) *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990)*

According to Article 2 of the Charter, any human being below the age of 18 is a child. The Charter addresses issues of particular concern to children such as: the best interest of the child as the primary consideration in all actions concerning the child (Article 4.1); economic and sexual exploitation of children (Article 15 and 27); the right to parental care and protection 9Article 19) and; elimination of harmful social and cultural practices affecting the welfare, dignity, normal growth and development of the child (Article 21). Biologically, a human being is called a child between birth and puberty, while legally; a child is a minor person who has no legal capacity and mental maturity (Franklin, 2002).

c) *Constitution of Zimbabwe (2013)*

Section 81 on the Rights of the Children provides that:

1) Every child, that is to say every boy and girl under the age of eighteen years, has the right-

(a) To equal treatment before the law including the right to be heard;

(b) To family or parental care, or to appropriate care when removed from the family environment;

(c) To be protected from economic and sexual exploitation, from child labour, and from maltreatment, neglect or any form of abuse

(d) To education, health care services, nutrition and shelter

2) A child's best interests are paramount in every matter concerning the child"

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d) The Marriage Act [Chapter 5:11]

This type of marriage is contracted in a civil ceremony either at the Civil Courts or in church. Section 22(1) of the Marriage Act provides that a boy under the age of 18 and a girl under the age of 16 have no capacity to marry. However, a girl of 16 has the capacity to contract a valid marriage. She only has to obtain consent of her parents or legal guardians. Secondly a boy under the age of 18 and a girl under the age of 16 can obtain the written permission to marry from the Minister of Justice Legal and Parliamentary Affairs if s/he considers it to be desirable for the marriage to be contracted.

e) The Customary Marriages Act [Chapter 5:07]

This is one of the more archaic pieces of legislation. This law is problematic in that despite the law granting majority status to women and thus giving them full rights to enter into various contracts including marriage, the requirement regarding the payment of the bride price remains a part of this law and the fact that marriages contracted under this legislation are potentially polygamous. This Act does not stipulate a minimum age for marriage.

In a land mark judgement for children and in particular the girl child by the Constitutional Court of Zimbabwe on the 20th of January 2016, the Deputy Chief Justice (now Chief Justice), Luke Malaba declared the long enduring practice of child marriages uncon-s-titutional. The facts of the case were that two young women namely; Loveness Mudzuru aged 18 and Ruvimbo Tsopodzi aged 19 brought their case to court asking the Constitutional Court to declare the practice of subjecting girls to early marriages unconstitutional under the new constitution of Zimbabwe. In particular they wanted Section 22 of the Marriages Act and the Customary Marriages Act to be declared uncon-stitutional for failing to prescribe a minimum age for marriage. In making this request to the court, the two women relied on section 78(1) which they argued had the effect of setting 18 years as the minimum age of marriage. In passing its judgement, the Constitutional Court was called upon to make a determination on the constitutionality of long standing clauses on marriages that allowed parents to marry off their children.

V. Causes of Child Marriages

This section focuses on the findings of the study. In Zimbabwe the practice of child marriage is as a result of a range of different factors. The causes generally fall within the themes of poverty, lack of education, religious beliefs, cultural beliefs, gender inequality, family status, and poverty, lack of education, culture, and family ties and relationships and gender inequality. These factors are discussed below.

a) Poverty

Poverty was indicated as one of the major causes of child marriages in Shamva district. All the fifteen respondents highlighted on the negative impact that child marriage has such as a child's educational opportunities, health and hygiene, sanitation, and access to food. One Village Headman indicated that:

> "There is serious poverty in this community. Children are dropping out of school after completing their Grade Seven because parents cannot afford to send them to secondary school".

A Case Care Worker supported the above sentiments and opined that: "Poverty in this area has left many children vulnerable to exploitation by gold panners. In most cases parents are marrying off their children as early as twelve years. Poverty has disrupted family stability and abuse of young girls". Families that are unable to provide the needs of their children may offer their young daughters for marriage in order to ensure they are supported. A poor girl is often the most vulnerable and exposed (UNICEF, 2011).

b) Lack of Education

Key informants noted the important role that education plays in child marriage. They indicated that girls who had primary education or no education at all were more likely to be married as children than girls who had attained secondary education. An Officer from the ZRP Victim Friendly Unit summed it up: "When a girl child is in school, she is seen as a child by those around her than as a woman ready to be married".

A respondent from the Apostolic Empowerment Trust further noted the importance of education to girls when she noted that: "Going to school is empowering for girls. It enables them to develop skills and knowledge, forge social networks that equip them to communicate, and stand up for their interests. This lack of education also makes them vulnerable to domestic violence and abuse".

Educated girls are better able to contribute to their countries' growth and development, and also to the prosperity and well-being of their future families (UNICEF, 2016). When their education is cut short, girls lose the chance to gain the skills and knowledge to secure a good job and provide for themselves and their families and are socially isolated (UNICEF, 2016). Completing secondary school is very important for girls as this will reduce the risk of marriage before the age of 18. When given proper education, girls tend to enter marriage and deliver children later in life and give birth to a fewer number of children (UNICEF, 2011). Girls in rural communities may be withdrawn from school at first menstruation in order to restrict their movements and protect their sexuality. This is also linked to the belief that girls' education will, in the long term, adversely influence their future roles as wives and mothers. Having a mother without a proper education increases the

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difficulty of retaining her children in school. This causes further complications in a negative cycle (UNFPA, 2012).

c) Religious Beliefs

Madziva community is mainly dominated by members of the Johane Masowe Wechishanu Apostolic Church. The church has its own doctrine which promotes child marriages. This was indicated by one member of the church who said that: "We seek guidance from the holy spirit first before marrying. So if I am directed to a young girl, I have no option but to marry".

A woman from the church who was married at the age of fourteen supported the above sentiment by indicating that: "If you go against the 'Holy Spirit' you are threatened with certain curses such as barrenness. As a young girl you cannot stand against what the holy spirit would have directed prophets and church Elders." One CCW noted that: "Young girls from the church cannot stand up for their rights and when they get married they cannot demand safe sex or take part in family planning issues such as child spacing."

The association between religion and child marriage varies according to countries. According to the ICRW (2007) reports there is no correlation between a specific religion and child marriage across the world. However, various religions can have an impact on child marriage in different countries (ICRW, 2007). UNFPA (2012) in its report entitled: *Marrying too Young: End child marriage* indicated that religion has an impact on the prevalence of child marriage.

d) Cultural Beliefs

From the study it was noted that cultural values and beliefs are deeply rooted in the Madziva community. Most families that were engaging in child marriages considered it as a way of securing their child's future. One Village Headman noted that: "Child marriage is a way of securing a child's future and at the same time reduce the financial responsibilities on the family. There is also need to ensure that the child's virginity is maintained at the time of marriage."

A Gender Focal Person opined that: "Virginity is seriously valued in this community. It is considered an important part of marriage. The general belief in this community is that the younger the girl, the higher the chances of being a virgin. That's why cases of child marriages are also high in this community."

A research on child marriages in Indonesia and Nepal indicated that the social group with the highest amounts of child marriage cases were the most traditional (Kim, Thapa and Achmad, 2001). In some African cultures, a virgin is valued by her husband and honoured by his family. Culture may be associated with gender discrimination, family honour, safeguarding virginity, family prestige, among other factors (Bamgbose, 2002). Menstruation is also a part of child marriage in some communities since the girl is then considered being ready for carrying a child and is therefore considered an adult (UNICEF, 2001).

e) Gender Inequality

Gender inequality was also noted to be a contributing factor on child marriages. As noted by the GFP that: "Boys and girls experience life differently. They face different challenges which they must adjust to. These challenges include passing school, proving sexuality, engaging in different sports and physical activities, and associating with a social group of peers." A Field Officer from a local NGO also supported the above sentiments. She opined that: "Girls in this community endure child marriage, sexual discomfort, and domestic violence because of discriminatory gender norms that prevent them from considering the possibility of a different life. These social and cultural pressures that girl's experience leads them straight into the marital state. You will realise that for boys these pressures do not translate into child marriage."

VI. Effects of Child Marriage

A number of effects on child marriages were indicated by respondents. These ranged from psychosocial harm, health and reproduction, denial of education, domestic violence and effects on off springs. These factors are discussed below.

a) Psychosocial Harm

Psychosocial harm was indicated as the biggest challenge that is faced in child marriages. A respondent from the ZRP VFU noted that: "Early marriage has serious psychosocial and emotional effects that are detrimental to young girls. These effects results in loss of childhood, forced sexual relations, and denial of free will, and social development."

One CCW mentioned that: "These child brides experience high levels of depression, anxiety and feelings of hopelessness. Imagine they are forced to marry men whom they have never met and who typically are much older than them in some cases old enough to be their fathers." Key informants generally agreed on the high expectations that these child brides are expected to meet. These related to catering for their husband's demands, household chores, and giving birth to children of their own as soon as possible, compulsory sexual intercourse, domestic violence, and loss of freedom of choice, expression, and association.

b) Health and Reproduction

Key informants generally noted a number of challenges posed by child marriage that have a bearing on their health. One CCW summed it when she said: "Child marriage increases the prevalence of infectious diseases, malnutrition, high child mortality rates, low life expectancy for women, and an inter-generational cycle of child abuse." One woman who was a victim of child marriage mentioned that: "My first born child was

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underweight because I got married at the age of fifteen. I also lost a friend who died during giving birth because she did not receive adequate care during pregnancy. A GFP mentioned a number of problems that child brides face. She highlighted that: "Most of these girls give birth to underweight babies. Their children also suffer from malnutrition during their crucial stages of development." Another victim of child marriage mentioned that "As young brides we are susceptible to contracting diseases from our husbands such as Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)."

For young married girls early sexual intercourse and pregnancy usually follow with complications that can be fatal due to the undeveloped body (UNFPA, 2012). The young bride is also often isolated from family and friends and forced to stay home instead of attending school (UNFPA, 2006). Child marriage can even be the cause of death due to early pregnancy causing internal complications (Svanemyr, Chandra-Mouli, Sigurdson Christiansen, and Mbizvo, 2012). According to research conducted by Markle, Fisher and Smego (2007), the pressure that is inflicted by the social expectancy to give birth soon after marriage lead women to become pregnant before they are physically developed to carry a child.

c) Denial of Education

All the key informants noted that education was both a significant factor causing child marriage and a consequence of child marriage as well. One CCW mentioned that: "When parents decide to marry off their daughter it means they no longer want her to continue with school. Some of these girls are married off before even finishing their primary education." A Field Officer from a local NGO also opined that: "Preventing girls from continuing with their education, young brides are deprived of the opportunity to develop intellectually, prepare for adulthood, and contribute to the progress of their family and society."

Depriving girls of education has grave repercussions on society. Studies have shown that the education of girls increases incomes, which benefits families and countries alike, and reduces the number of children the girl will have. Education guarantees significant improvements in the health of their children, reduces the risk of HIV infection, decreases domestic violence, lessens the likelihood of harmful traditional practices, and on a broad scale has the ability to promote democracy and political participation (Herz and Sperling).

d) Domestic Violence

From the study it was noted that child brides are more vulnerable to domestic violence, and cannot make decisions about safe sex and family planning. A Village Headman mentioned that: "Child brides are at a higher risk of contracting STIs and HIV and AIDS, pregnancy and childbearing before their bodies are fully mature." The GFP supported this by indicating that: "I have noted in this community that girls who are married during childhood have a greater risk of experiencing domestic violence and abuse than women who marry as adults. Due to the uneven power dynamics, age differences, and the girl's dependency on her husband, young brides often lack the resources to escape from an abusive environment."

A common factor within child marriage is the great age difference between the girl and her husband. The husband often tends to be significantly older than his wife. Therefore, the girl is more likely to lose influence which sometimes results in domestic violence. In child marriage, lack of communication and understanding between the spouses can lead to violence and higher rates of divorce (Dean, 2016; Soguel, 2014).

e) Effects on Offspring

The responses from the study also showed that child marriage has an effect beyond the married bride. The next generations are also at a high risk of illnesses and deaths. The CCW mentioned that: "Adolescent mothers have a higher risk than older women for delivering infants who are preterm and of low birth weight. Deaths may also be as a result of young mother's poor health, immaturity, and lack access to social and reproductive services." The Field Officer supported the above sentiments by indicating that: "Babies are also at high risk of acquiring HIV and AIDS at delivery and during breastfeeding. Untreated STIs such as gonorrhoea, Chlamydia, syphilis, and herpes simplex virus infection can lead to premature delivery, congenital neonatal infections, and blindness."

VII. Conclusion

Child marriage is a serious human rights issue in Shamva district and most parts of Zimbabwe. By robbing girls of their potential, child marriage robs families, communities and nations of the contributions these girls might have made as women. Child marriage hampers countries' efforts to improve the health of mothers and children, fight malnutrition and keep children in school. When girls are married as children, they cannot help but pass on poverty, low education and poor health to the next generation (UNICEF, 2016). Child marriages have both physical and psychological consequences. From these consequences, girls are likely to experience psychological problems such as anxiety, which in worst cases can lead to suicide (Soylu, Ayaz and Yüksel, 2014). The devaluing of women and girls fosters the practice of child marriage and increase powerlessness and vulnerability of the child brides. Child brides often suffer from domestic violence, marital rape, deprivation of food, lack of access to information, education, and healthcare, and restrictions on mobility. Efforts to reduce sexual gender-based violence,

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advance education, overcome poverty, and improve health indicators have also been hampered by child marriages. Child marriage reinforces the gender implications of poverty and powerlessness, diminishing the physical, mental, intellectual and social growth of the girl and intensifying her social isolation. It also elevates the likelihood for Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), obstetric fistulas, maternal and infant mortality, and depression (Nawal, 2008).

While it appears that the legal framework to protect girl child from child marriages in Zimbabwe exists, a problem lies in the Customary Marriages Act which does not provide a minimum age for marriage and has therefore been abused. Zimbabwean authorities should amend or repeal all existing marriage laws that still allow child marriages and develop a Child Marriages Act to end child marriages. The Government of Zimbabwe should develop a National Action Plan (NAP) to empower girls. This will enable girls to value themselves, to know and exercise their rights, to develop skills to support their own life plans and to have opportunities to connect with their peers and support one another. This can be achieved through programmes that equip girls with training, skills, information, as well as the provision of safe spaces and support networks.

There is need for provision of adequate health, education, justice and other services, to remove the structural barriers that push girls into child marriage and prevent them from accessing support within marriage. These services range from providing adolescent-friendly health services, to ensuring that schools are accessible and child friendly, and to providing safe spaces and other support services for married girls. Civic organisations should mobilise families and communities as agents of change, by creating awareness of the harmful impact of child marriage, and of alternative roles for girls and women, so that families and communities prefer not to marry their daughters as children and so that they themselves take part in efforts to end child marriage.

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