



PROTECTING RIGHTS & UNLEASHING POTENTIAL FOR GIRLS

EXIT REPORT OF THE FORMER AFRICAN UNION GOODWILL AMBASSADOR ON ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE 2014 - 2022

Prepared by Dr. Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda



Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I am grateful to the African Union Commission (AUC) for having appointed me as the Goodwill Ambassador on Ending Child “Marriage” under the then Chairmanship of Dr. Nkosazana Dhlamini Zuma, the first and so far, the only woman to have served in this role in 2014. I also had the pleasure to serve under the Commission on Social Development, the Health, Humanitarian, and Social Development Commission with Dr. Mustafa Kaloko, Commissioner El Fadil, and recently with Aminata Setouma. The extraordinary technical support from the Ending Child “Marriage” Unit and now the Harmful Practices Unit was instrumental in facilitating my work. I remain grateful to the African Union Member States, the civil society organizations, and the young people, especially the girls and young women, for the trust, the sharing, and the facilitation of my work.

Over the years, many partners have supported me in documenting my experiences and sharing them with various partners, whose knowledge base provided a resource base for this report. I want to especially mention Save the Children, Plan International, IM Swedish Development Agency, Girls Not Brides, SADC Parliamentary Forum, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNWOMEN, COTLA, Pan African Alliance on Ending Child Marriage, and Rozaria Memorial Trust (RMT) among others. This list is not exhaustive. I also want to express special appreciation to the Spotlight Initiative, UNFPA, and Equality Now for their technical and financial support which enabled the research and development of this exit report. I appreciate the SRHR Africa Trust’s facilitation through Rozaria Memorial Trust, enabling me to have a research assistant - Loveness Mudzuru - for this documentation. I appreciate the Gender is My Agenda Campaign (GIMAC) and Girls and Goals for their support in the data collection for this report.

Lastly, I extend my deepest gratitude to all who participated in the key informant interviews, the focused group discussions, the survey, and all who provided materials and literature for this report. I remain equally grateful to my research team, especially Loveness Mudzuru, Farirai Gumbonzvanda, Munashe Gumbonzvanda, and Vimbisio Deka who put in many, many hours of work. The NG Development Agency team who put together an archive of materials as a reference point for this report, thank you.

I continue to dedicate this work and this report to the thousands of individuals and organisations doing all they can to end this abuse, rape, and sexual exploitation of children and especially girls, called child “marriage”, a term that simply rationalises and normalises a gross and massive violation of their multiple rights, with impunity and limited access to justice and healing.

About Dr. Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda



Dr. Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda was born when her home country, Zimbabwe, was at war and she grew up in resource-poor rural communities. Her struggle for dignity and opportunity drove her passion for an alternative pathway for women, girls, and their families.

She has spent more than thirty-five years in development, human rights, peace, and security with a focus on women's empowerment, gender equality, and children's rights including serving as Regional Director for UNIFEM, human rights officer with UNICEF and as a General Secretary of the World YWCA, a global organization with a reach of over 25 million women and girls in 22,000 communities in 120 countries. She also held other UN positions in advisory capacities including as a member of the External Advisory Group to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director during the COVID-19 (2019-2022) and currently serves as a member of the UNFPA Oversight and Advisory Committee.

She is the Founder and Executive Director of RMT, a Zimbabwean organization which supports innovative approaches to health and education especially in rural & resource-poor communities, and is community-rooted with a regional and international track record of influencing policy.

Dr. Gumbonzvanda provides thought leadership and policy advice, delivers impactful programmes, nurtures intentional partnerships, and engages in global and regional advocacy

actions to advance the rights and empowerment of women and girls in a career that has spanned inter-governmental, governmental, and civil society organizations.

Appointed by the first female Chair of AUC Dr. Nkosazana Dhlamini Zuma as the first **African Union Goodwill Ambassador on Ending Child Marriage** in 2014, Dr. Gumbonzvanda served for 8 years engaging with Heads of State, Ministers and parliamentarians, civil society, and young people, negotiating for continental decisions and positions on issues of women and girls, such as Common African Positions and now the Heads of State decision of 2023 for the development of the AU Convention on Violence Against Women and Girls.

She is leading ground-breaking work on engaging with and transforming traditional and religious institutions for the protection of the rights of children in the effort to end child marriage by changing social norms, notably, the formation of the Council of Traditional Leaders on Ending Child "Marriage" and female genital mutilation (COTLA/CONATA), and the Pan African Alliance on Ending Child "marriage" (PAAECM).

Dr. Gumbonzvanda holds a Doctor of Laws Degree (Honoris Causa), a Master's degree in law, a postgraduate qualification in conflict transformation, and extensive training in gender and rights-based programming.

She serves on the boards of several organizations and has received many awards in recognition of her work in promoting women's and children's rights. She is married with two children, is a poet, and enjoys reading.

Dr. Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda

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Abbreviations/Acronyms

ACRWC	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
AU	African Union
AUC	African Union Commission
AU GWA	African Union Goodwill Ambassador
CECAP	“Coligação para Eliminação dos Casamentos Prematuros” - Girls Not Brides Mozambique
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CAP	Common African Position
CSO-RG	Civil Society Organisations Reference Group
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
COTLA	Council of Traditional Leaders of Africa
ECM	Ending Child “Marriage”
FEMNET	The African Women’s Development and Communication Network
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FAWE	Forum for African Women Educationalists
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GIMAC	Gender is My Agenda Campaign
ISWSW	Institute of Women Social Workers
KII	Key Informant Interview
PAAECM	Pan-African Alliance on Ending Child “marriage”
RECs	Regional Economic Communities
ROOTS	Real Open Opportunities for Transformation Support
SADC	Southern African Development Community
STC	Specialized Technical Committee
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
TOR	Terms Of Reference
UMP	Uzumba Maramba Pfungwe
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
WHO	World Health Organisation
WLSA	Women Lawyers of Southern Africa
YWCA	Young Women’s Christian Association
YWN	Young Women’s Network

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Chapter One: **Introduction**



Credit: Riccardo Mayer / Shutterstock

Child marriage has major detrimental impacts on millions of girls annually. According to UNICEF¹ 650 million girls and women who are alive today are thought to have gotten married before turning eighteen. Over 50 million of them reside in Eastern and Southern Africa. Nearly one-third (32 percent) of the region's young women were married before age 18. Of the 41 countries worldwide that have child "marriage" rates of over 30%, all but 11 of these are in Africa.²

Child marriage, a crime, that results in multiple violations of human rights for mostly girls and young women, is an abuse, that rationalises and normalises sexual violence and rape against girls. It has been described as a form of modern-day slavery. It is rooted in gender discrimination and the disempowerment of women, robbing them of the right to make decisions about their bodies. It is also grounded in the patriarchal values of girls and women being dependent socially, economically, and financially on men who might not be their choice.

The AUC views child marriage as a multifaceted issue that touches on development, culture, health, politics, and religion, among other areas. The AU expressly supports policies about youth rights. It has equally promoted the adoption and implementation of numerous instruments at regional and national levels and conducted monitoring and implementation by Member States to ensure accountability. To address this, the AU developed a campaign to end child marriage.

On May 29, 2014, at the Fourth Conference of AU Ministers of Social Development, the AU initiated the Campaign to End Child Marriage in Africa. The campaign originally scheduled to run from 2014 to 2016, targeting ten high-burden countries, was extended for an additional two years to 2018, targeting 30 high-prevalence countries. A campaign strategy was also set for 2019–2023 but is set to be extended. It was also incorporated into the work of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC), which appointed a Special Rapporteur on Ending Child Marriage and Other Harmful Practices of the African Union. Dr. Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda was designated as the AU's Goodwill Ambassador for Ending Child Marriage (AU GWA) in 2014. Her term of office expired on December 31, 2022.

Several key stakeholders, from civil society to governments, and most recently, through the participation of traditional leaders under umbrellas such as COTLA are engaged with the campaign. Through the Civil Society Organizations (CSO) Reference Group, youth and women's-led networks and movements such as the Gender is My Agenda Campaign (GIMAC) and the African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), several local communities' actions have been taken to reach the young girls where they live.

Dr. Gumbonzvanda was the first person assigned to this mandate, her experience and expertise in this role have the potential to shape the future of this mandate, learning from the gains, challenges, and networks of her time in office.

According to UNICEF 650 million girls and women who are alive today are thought to have gotten married before turning eighteen.¹

1 UNICEF, [Child marriage database](#) - 2020

2 UNFPA, [Child marriage evidence report](#) - 2021

Report Aims and Objectives

The purpose of this Exit Report is to highlight the experiences and achievements of the AU GWA, as well as challenges and how she overcame them including providing recommendations to the next mandate holder. It seeks to provide further commentary on trends, issues, and promising practices that the AU GWA observed throughout her eight-year tenure. The report goes on to examine the relevance of the mandate and how it can be improved further. It can act as a baseline and guide for the incoming AU GWA, highlighting the strategies that worked and those that should be improved upon to eradicate child “marriage”.

According to the AU mandate, the former AU GWA now serves as an intellectual advisor. Her eight years of experience in this role can provide a crucial component of accountability for the governments, the African Union Commission, and other stakeholders who supported this mandate.



Credit: Blessed Mudhaka / NGDA

Specific goals of the Exit Report:

- Explains the AU GWA's mandate, its contributions to fulfilling continental commitments, and the campaign's specific goals, and details the methods used to carry out the mandate, interactions with governments, other development partners, and networks of civil society.
- Considers different viewpoints on the development discourse, women's rights, gender equality, and child protection, as well as the shortcomings in service delivery, resource availability, and accountability to past commitments, and any contributions to the conceptual framework and framing of the problem of child “marriage” on the continent.
- Reflects on the contemporary context and provides an analysis of the emerging trends, including emergencies such as COVID-19, conflict, and climate-based humanitarian situations. In addition, it also explores the key drivers and push factors that are perpetuating child “marriage” including a deeper reflection on the impact and consequences.
- Recognizes and records noteworthy advancements as well as the most effective methods for putting an end to child “marriage”. This serves as motivation for the different players and highlights potential areas for adaptation, scaling up, and replication.
- Provides objective advice on areas of contradiction and stagnation that require significant investment and emerging issues, either for programming, advocacy, or research.
- Makes recommendations to governments, the incoming AU GWA, AU, AUC, and other stakeholders that accelerate and spotlight doable actions for the achievement of the strategic direction to 2030.

Methodology

The primary research instruments used to prepare this report include a literature review, key informant interviews, a series of online and in-person focus groups, webinars, and an examination of traditional and social media. These qualitative tools are presented in more detail in the subsequent paragraphs.

- **Literature and desk reviews** were used to describe the influence of the mandate including exploring contemporary trends. There was an open call for contributions from different partners and stakeholders although most of the publicly accessible literature was from academic institutions, international non-governmental organizations, and United Nations agencies. Unpublished reports and grey literature, frequently containing highly informative materials, are frequently held by community-rooted organizations.
- **Interviews with key informants (KII)** were held with several specific organizations that have over the years worked closely and mobilized around the mandate of the AU GWA. These included organizations such as Save the Children, the Break Free Consortium, Plan International, Rozaria Memorial Trust, FAWE & SRHR Africa Trust, GIMAC Network, IM Swedish Development Partner, the Regional Young Women's Network, Girls Not Brides, Equality Now, World Vision, and the Pan African Alliance on Ending Child Marriage.
- **Focused group discussions (FGDs)** and several consultations were held with different stakeholder groups ensuring diversity and comprehensive regional coverage. It should be noted that while most of the FGDs were conducted virtually, some were conducted informally on the periphery of various policy, advocacy, and influence spaces. In these spaces, national and international representatives of the United Nations, government officials, survivors of child marriage, young women and girls, activists and advocates for child rights, and experts on sexual and reproductive health, gender equality, and human rights were engaged in the various discussions. There was an intention to ensure extensive geographical coverage that included all the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) by ensuring at least one representative from each of the 8 blocks. Extra consultations with the CSO Reference Group on Ending Child Marriage and a public one were held to address some of the information gaps.
- **Traditional and social media reviews** included scanning of traditional and social media as a way of collating information about the campaign and the contributions of the AU Goodwill Ambassador. The digital footprint was examined as to how it reveals the shifts and nuancing of messages including some of the emerging issues.
- **Collection of case studies** are presented throughout the report to highlight key points associated with a mix of narratives compiled from the interviews and self-authored narratives by those who worked with the AU GWA.

Limitations

Language accessibility:

The primary constraint was the minimal language diversity observed in the materials reviewed and the interviews conducted. Data collection was in English, and this limited the ability to access quality information and insights from the French and Portuguese-speaking communities. Evidence surfaced through demographics of individuals who took part in the various data collection exercises showing shorter texts, like media articles, that could be translated quickly. Larger reports and grey literature, especially in Portuguese and Arabic, were more difficult to obtain suggesting a bias in the information provided in favour of Anglophone countries.

Challenging contexts:

The second major challenge was reaching partners and respondents who are currently in crisis or humanitarian situations, for example, in Niger and Sudan. This situation was indicative of how the narratives of young women and girls in such contexts often get left out of critical conversations that are intended to shape their lives. Despite the researcher travelling to Mozambique on a UN-related mission, it was still difficult to access conflict-affected areas for primary information.

Reliance on virtual discussions:

Thirdly, most of the key informant interviews and focus group discussions were held virtually, with a few select sessions held in Zambia with the Pan African Alliance, in Nairobi within the framework of the 20th anniversary of the Maputo Protocol and during the UNFPA-Equality Now regional CSO Forum on ending child marriage. The lack of reliable connectivity and the cost of data may have limited some respondents from effective participation in the virtual discussions.

While there has been a strong response from various stakeholders, there were insufficient responses received from the African Union Commission's Harmful Practices Unit itself. However, positive responses and support were received from other sections including the Special Rapporteur on Ending Child Marriage, the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa, and the Gender Directorate.

Chapter Two:

The AU Campaign on Ending Child Marriage

The AUC's 2014 ECM campaign was meant to advance the sustainable development goals (SDGs) especially target 5.3 as it pertains to the eradication of harmful practices like child, early, and forced marriage. Additionally, target 16.2 addresses the cessation of abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and all types of violence against women, as well as the torture of children. The Common African Position (CAP) on Ending Child Marriage, adopted by Heads of State in 2015, as well as current Strategic Directions and Accountability Frameworks on Ending Child Marriage, all served as the foundation for the campaign.



Credit: Bright Farai Zindove / NCDA

Objectives of the African Union Campaign to End Child Marriage

The Campaign sought to advance, defend, and advocate for African women's and girls' rights, in line with AU Agenda 2063. It aimed to accelerate the abolition of child marriage in Africa by supporting legal and policy initiatives that uphold human rights, increasing awareness of the detrimental socioeconomic effects of child marriage throughout the continent, promoting social movement and social mobilization at the local and national levels, and bolstering the capacity of non-state actors to engage in evidence-based policy advocacy, including the role of youth leadership through new media technology, monitoring, and evaluation. Additionally, the Campaign built on the efforts already made by governments and partners to end child marriage centring advocacy, monitoring, and evaluation (M&E), capacity building, and the facilitation of technical assistance. Finally, it was established to bolster the body of evidence required to create and carry out efficient policies and initiatives aimed at lowering the number of child marriages.

The AUC committed to the following strategies and key activities in support of the campaign:

- Advocating for policy formulation on ending child marriages at regional, sub-regional, and national levels
- The launch of the national campaigns at national levels.
- Convening the Girls Summit on Child Marriage.
- Country Monitoring Missions

Credit: Kings College London panel on developing Child marriage research gaps and priorities in Sub Saharan Africa



Appointment of the Presidential Champion on Ending Child Marriages, the Special Rapporteur, and the AU Goodwill Ambassador

With the launch of the Campaign, the AU immediately appointed the Presidential Champion on Ending Child marriage, the Africa Union Goodwill Ambassador (AU GWA), and the Special Rapporteur on child marriage within ACERWC, to support the advocacy, monitoring, and accountability of the continental commitments on ending child marriage.

The role of the Presidential Champions was to foster high-level political leadership to end child marriage, promote ownership by Heads of State and Government, and facilitate peer learning. The first appointed presidential champion was H.E. Edgar Lungu - the former president of Zambia. The role was aimed at providing the highest political leadership, as he did when lobbying the Peace and Security Council's 692nd session whose theme was ending child marriages³. As presidential champions, they would have the power to convene on child marriage, within the mechanisms of the AU including at global platforms. The presidential champion as a core part of his mandate could convene and hold special high-level meetings at platforms such as during the AU annual summit, within the UN - at the General Assembly and the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).

Additionally, it was to share the accountability through periodic reporting from the Presidential Champion to the Heads of State and addressing the summit specifically on child marriage. On 3 July 2017, the AU Champion on Ending Child Marriage, His Excellency President Edgar Chagwa Lungu of Zambia presented the progress report on the Campaign to End Child Marriage to the 29th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the AU.⁴ This came at a time when Zambia was developing the Children's Code⁵ which is a progressive piece of legislation that explicitly bans and criminalizes child marriage.

Finally, the Presidential Champions are also responsible for advocating for resources on the protection of the child especially around ending harmful practices. This includes ensuring national budgets cover the issue of child marriage and the private sector is encouraged to put forward investment towards not only the eradication of harmful practices but also the social protection of survivors.

The appointment of the AU GWA was well received by governments, civil society, and donors. This mandate reports to the director of social affairs and collaborates closely with the AU coordination mechanisms; day-to-day operations are carried out through the Harmful Practices Unit. The mandate sits in the Specialized Technical Committee (STC) and the Ministerial meetings as well as chairing the CSO reference group on ending child marriage.

Formal terms of reference of the AU GWA's mandate:

- A public advocate for Africa's effort to end child marriage.
- Advisory role to both governments and CSOs as well as other relevant stakeholders working on child marriage.
- Building partnerships for the work on ending child marriage
- Supporting outreach work of the campaign including country initiatives
- Convening as appropriate.

Every year, the AU GWA creates a work plan that is submitted to the AUC and ideally incorporated into the work plan for the campaign at large. The AU GWA submitted the first comprehensive report in 2021 (covering the years 2019–2021) and reported on children's rights including progress made towards advancing gender equality at large as the continent moves toward Agenda 2063.⁶ The report reflected on the key drivers, consequences, and impacts of child marriage, drawing from the lessons learnt during the official country missions including during the AU GWA's individual engagements. The report included some strategic achievements during its initial years with Burkina Faso, Chad, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Morocco, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Kenya, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Some of the recommendations in this report have since been adopted by governments, including Zambia and Zimbabwe.

3 Kodjo, Tchioffo. ["Press Statement of the 692nd Meeting of the PSC Dedicated to an Open Session on the Theme: 'Ending Child marriages' -African Union - Peace and Security Department.](#)

4 Chisango, Tawanda. ["President Lungu Briefs African Union Assembly on Progress in Continental Campaign to End Child marriage - World."](#) July 2017.

5 [Realizing the African Union Campaign to End Child marriage: Lessons from Malawi & Zambia](#) . Policy paper Emerging lessons from child marriage programming in Malawi and Zambia. Nov. 2023.

6 Gumbonzvanda N. Dr, 2021. [AU Goodwill Ambassador's Report on Ending Child marriage](#)

Chapter Three:

The AU GWA 2014 - 2022: Impact and Lessons

The impact of the AU GWA's mandate will be examined, reflecting, and evaluating initial work, and activities and showcasing lessons learnt including recommendations for future mandate holders.

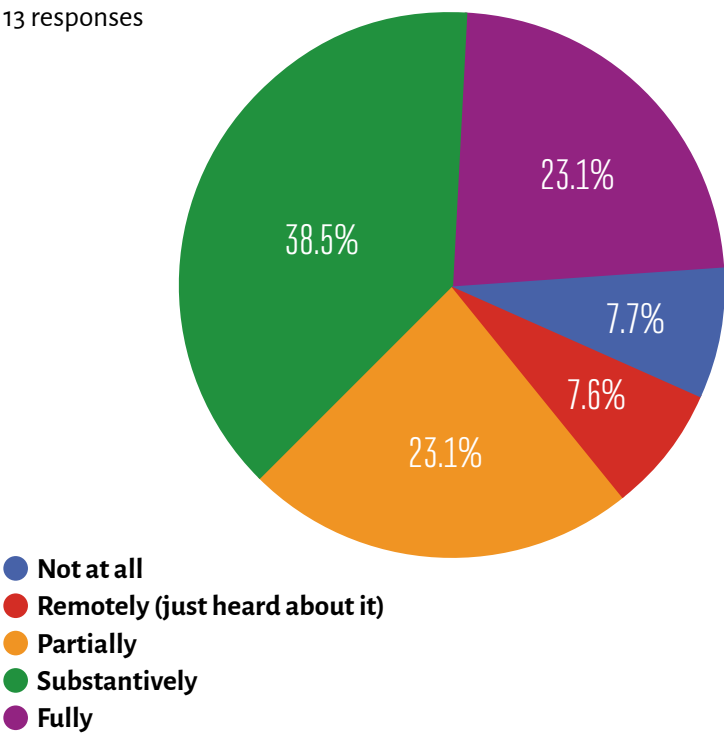


Campaign's Visibility and Level of Stakeholder Engagement

An analysis of the campaign's visibility was conducted through a survey where 15 respondents shared their level of engagement.

Have you been involved in the African Union campaign on Ending Child Marriage?

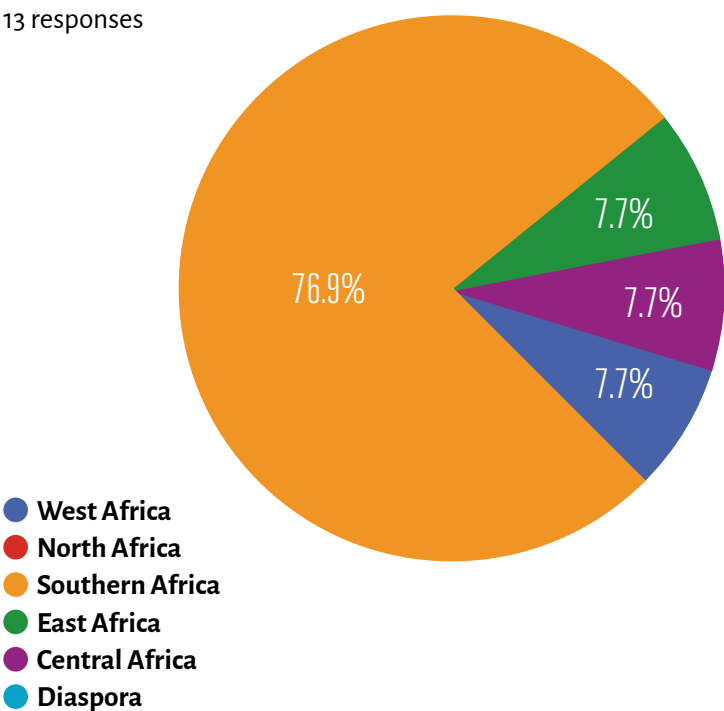
13 responses



Findings show that almost 40% of respondents were substantially involved in the campaign, with 23% being fully engaged with the campaign.

What region do you come from?

13 responses

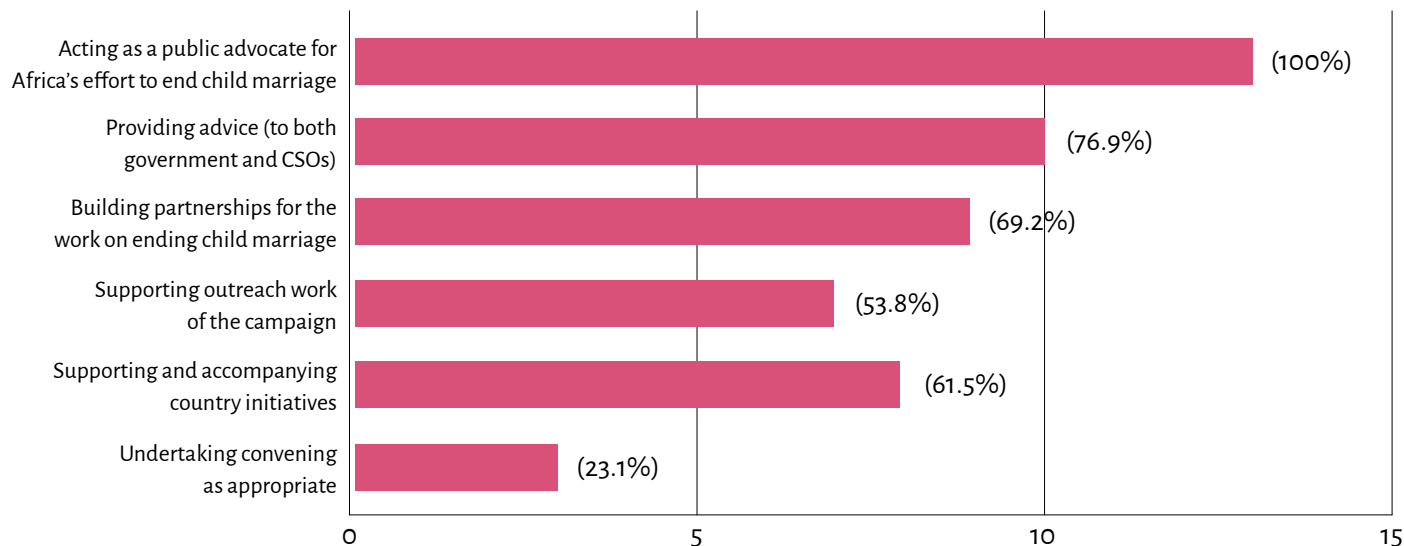


Even though the people who were engaged in the movement to outlaw child marriage came from all corners of the continent and beyond, results indicated that most participants were from the southern region. The AU Goodwill Ambassador was stationed in the south, contributing to the campaign's greater visibility. The AU Campaign and the survey were also mostly in English and therefore limited effective outreach and participation of French and Portuguese-speaking communities.

Reflections on AU GWA's Accomplishments

Respondents to the survey were asked to rate the most important role of the AU GWA's mandate according to the Terms of Reference.

In which areas do you think the former AU GWA was most involved and impactful?



Almost 77% of respondents noted that she was an impactful advocate for ending child marriages evidenced through her work at the community, national, regional, and global levels. She was also on multiple advisory bodies of different stakeholders working on ending child marriage. She built and strengthened partnerships for the work on ending child marriages as highlighted by 69.2% of respondents.

3.1. A Public Advocate for Africa's Effort to End Child Marriage

In fulfilling one of her mandates as a public advocate for ending child marriages at the highest levels, both continentally and globally, she made a political commitment to eradicate child, early, and forced marriages during the United Nations Human Rights Council (UN HRC) in Geneva in 2015. The event was hosted by UN agencies, and NGOs including the African Union, the Center for Reproductive Rights, UNFPA, WHO, and the governments of Sierra Leone, Italy, Belgium, and Uruguay⁷.

After this announcement, Dr. Gumbonzvanda created and convened multiple spaces for girls to interact with decision-makers, duty-bearers, the advocacy community, and other stakeholders making it possible for many African girls to attend AU summits. In these spaces, girls would share their stories, push for change, and hold influential people accountable through their interactions with ministers and presidents at these high-level gatherings. Upon returning to their respective countries following the convenings, the girls would be encouraged to continue engaging with their

respective national policymakers and cultural influencers. The impact she had on girls was clearly articulated by one of the primary informants stated, "The AU GWA was a strength for the young people of Africa with her motive to empower young people to drive change through advocacy, both her own and others"⁸.

The AU GWA successfully fundraised for girls' participation in the different spaces as it was important for the girls to represent themselves, allowing their voices and real-life experiences of girls and the community-rooted, young women-led organizations to be heard at the highest level. This strategy was successful and powerful as it brought girls to the negotiation tables, and contributed to the development of policies, interventions, and behavior change strategies.

⁷ United Nations Human Rights Council, 2015. Contributor, SEM. "[African Union Commits to Ending Child, Early and Forced marriage.](#)"

⁸ Source: KII - a member of the Young Women's Regional Network on Ending Child marriages interviewed in Zambia Aug 2023

3.2. Advisory Role to Governments, CSOs, and Other Relevant Stakeholders Working on Child Marriage

As an advisor to the AU, heads of state, commissioners, governments, and ministries, the AU GWA is allowed to attend Ministerial and STC meetings at the AU. She had direct access and the ability to regularly advise governments and acted as a liaison between the public, CSOs, and policymakers.

The special mandates on women's rights and gender composed of the AU-GWA, the Special Rapporteur on Ending Child Marriage, and the Special Rapporteur on Women's Rights & Special Envoy on Women, Peace, and Security also held strategic joint sessions.

Through attending conferences, workshops, and meetings with CSOs, she was able to establish connections and subsequently continue to provide advice to these organizations. She advised, shared information, and participated at events for networks like the Zambia Network on Ending Child Marriage, a network of 35–40 organizations in Zambia working together to end child marriage.⁹ She gave suggestions on how to best influence their governments, intergovernmental bodies, and policy-making processes, in addition to advice on how to advance their local programming to guarantee maximum impact.

As an advisor to the African Union:

- **Technical support:** She offered technical support to the Harmful Practices Unit in developing the Accountability Framework on Ending Harmful Practices, which was presented and adopted at the Ministerial Meeting in 2022. During the review of the implementation of the campaign to end child marriage which was adopted in 2023, she recommended that the strategic direction be expanded to more than the original two-year period and have a strong alignment to the Sustainable Development Goals. With Agenda 2063's long-term strategy being 'An Africa free of Child marriage', this would allow for the current strategy to be reviewed in 2030 permitting long-term planning and resource allocation.
- **Engagement with the Treaty bodies:** She contributed to the joint general comment on Child marriage developed by the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights and the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child in 2017. She also supported the development of joint general comment which guides member states within their work and provides interpretation of state obligations towards ending child marriage, thereby creating the jurisprudence on children's rights.
- **Engagement at the leadership level:** She provided technical content advice during the development of the Common African Position (CAP) on ending child marriage which was presented at the head of states meeting in South Africa in 2015. The CAP on ending child marriage provided a clear direction of what was being monitored at the level of the Head of States.
- **Supporting the Presidential Champion on Ending Child Marriage:** She contributed to preparing the annual reports of the Presidential Champion working with the Zambian government ministries responsible for women and gender on child marriage issues. The AU GWA's support to the Presidential Champion led to a review of the terms of reference of the presidential champion role which was shared with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs during the AUC mission visit to Zambia in 2022. It is recommended that this role be strengthened and that an annual or bi-annual, report be directly presented by the Presidential Champion to the heads of states to ensure that child marriage remains a priority to the head of states. She also recommended the development and launch of a scorecard or a periodic report once every year to advance the AU's commitments to ending child marriage.
- **Support to the Regional Economic Communities (RECs):** She engaged and supported the Southern African Development Community Parliamentary Forum (SADC PF) in the development of the SADC Model Law on ending child marriage and participated in its adoption. She contributed to the setting up of the model law monitoring committee and developed the terms of reference. She continued to engage during the SADC PF Public Hearings and attended the meetings of the SADC Model Law Monitoring Committees in 2023. She recommends replicating the SADC PF model law work by other RECs to inspire the Pan African Parliament to prioritize the issue of child marriage. She recommends that the AU create a budget to support the next AU GWA mandate holder to expand the work to other regions.

9 Source: FDG with the Network in Lusaka August 2023

CASE STUDY: Work with the Madzimawe Foundation

Credit: Naver Chayelesa, Madzimawe Foundation



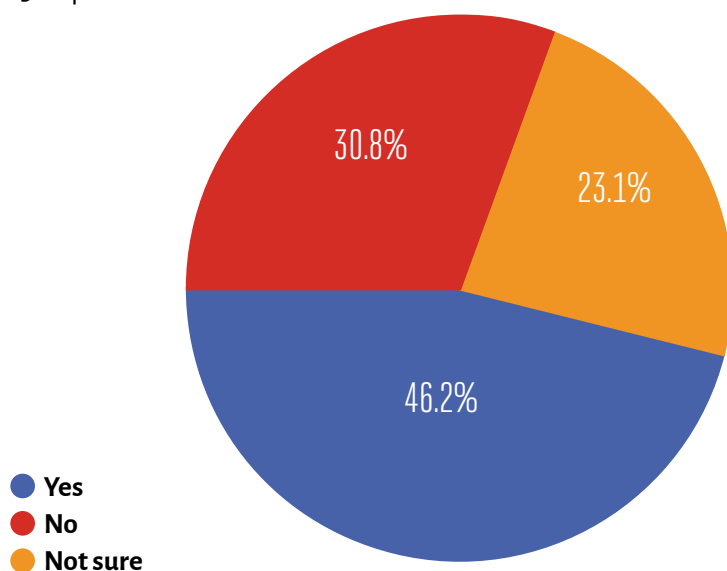
The Madzimawe Foundation, established in 2016 and headed by Chief Madzimawe in Zambia, is one of the numerous CSOs that could attest to the impact that the strategic guidance and support of the AU GWA can have. In the Chipata district of Zambia's Eastern Province, the organization works to end child marriage. The organization uses evidence-based approaches to prevent child “marriage” and respond to it, with an emphasis on community sensitization and awareness-raising.

At the 2016 AU media review meeting, the AU GWA first established contact with the Madzimawe Foundation. They presented their work and progress made and asked her for suggestions on how to improve their work. Since then, the Madzimawe Foundation and the AU GWA have engaged, given advice, worked together, and planned events to end child marriage. As a result of her persistent advocacy for the foundation's efforts to end child marriage, other traditional leaders were inspired to institutionalize their development work and acknowledge this as a best practice. Chief Madzimawe was the first to form a national chapter of the Council of Traditional Leaders in Africa (COTLA), and he has been bringing together traditional leaders in Zambia at all levels, including headmen of villages. In the battle against child “marriage”, the AU GWA was acknowledged as a “very powerful source of knowledge and expertise, and her wisdom in this area I would say without any reservation is unsurpassed,” according to Naver Chayela of the Madzimawe Foundation.

The CSO Reference Group On Ending Child Marriages

The mandate of the African Union was supported by the CSO Reference Group on ending child marriage. Were you aware of this structure?

13 responses



To ensure that the voice of the people is directly heard within the bureaucratic halls of the African Union, the AU approved the setting up of an AU CSO Reference Group on ending child marriage. The reference group, composed of ten civil society and community-based organizations from AU member states, was chaired by the AU GWA. The role of the reference group is to support the work of the AU GWA in creating documents, organizing events, and providing advice to the AU campaign to end child marriage. Additionally, its members provide continuous assistance through their networks and programs, including the Media Awards and RIATT-ESA.

Almost 50% of the respondents knew about the existence of the CSO Reference Group on Child marriage during the report's compilation. Though the CSO Reference Group was never strategically funded, it carried out many activities and supported the mandate of the AU GWA.

Activities of the AU CSO Reference Group:

- Contribute to and support Accountability and Reporting e.g., supporting President Lungu's Report, AU Goodwill Ambassadors Report, and Institutional Reports within the AU
- Strategic Convenings: The group contributed effectively towards facilitating the participation of young girls during strategic convenings. They would not only fund delegates but also push for them to be included in the program in meaningful rather than tokenistic terms during the planning process.
- Advisory and knowledge management
- Develop and issue advisory briefs on Child marriage, teenage pregnancy, and COVID-19.
- Support AU-GWA-led research on access to justice in traditional/customary courts.
- Support AU in developing an engagement paper with CSOs.
- Ongoing Support to AUC Coordination
- Participate in the Technical Working Group

Recommendations were tabled during the first AU Girls Summit on how to increase the effectiveness of the reference groups, including the following:

- AUC must have a clear strategy and approach which is documented, consistent, and resourced for engagement with civil society at all levels as part of the campaign and go beyond the convening with Addis-based organizations.
- The establishment of more visible partnerships and collaborations with government agencies and ministries in charge of addressing child marriage should be prioritized to further enhance the impact. Additionally, the prioritisation of holding governments accountable. By leveraging its influence with CSOs throughout the Continent, the CSO-RG can better support the AU in sharing information and supporting interventions within a coordinated approach to research and knowledge management, accountability frameworks, and even raising awareness of the Campaign to End Child Marriage.
- Increase the pace of resource mobilization campaigns aimed at getting more young girls and women to attend regional and global conferences on child marriage.
- Develop strategic methods for consistently receiving feedback from Africa's broader civil society.
- Encourage more interactions and regional gatherings for advocacy in its capacity as the CSO-RG

3.3. Developed and Strengthened Partnerships on Ending Child Marriage

Building and strengthening partnerships to end child marriages was a significant and vital component of the AU GWA's work. She created space for CSOs to engage with governments and their ministries. She facilitated the involvement of several rural community-rooted organizations in the AU. Among the youth organizations, she supported were the Rozaria Memorial Trust (RMT), Gender is My Agenda Campaign (GIMAC), Institute of Women Social Workers (ISWSW), Youth Vibes Afrika and Real Open Opportunities for Transformation Support (ROOTS) in getting access into these spaces would allow them to build regional and continental partnerships.

These collaborations advanced efforts to end child marriage because the government had direct access to knowledge of initiatives and interventions in the areas where the issue is prevalent. The AU GWA met with the organizations in different countries during her mission visits even if it was not on the official schedule. These meetings with community organizations, young women-led organizations, UN agencies, and donors included discussions on future collaborations and engagements, or sometimes even to draft an initiative to end child marriage.

The AU GWA and a few civil society organizations led the establishment of the Pan African Alliance on Ending Child Marriage (PAAECM). She recommends that the AU acknowledges the PAAECM as a consortium dedicated to ending child marriage. She facilitated the strategic engagement and partnership between the PAAECM and the members of the CSO Reference Group.



Credit: Nokutenda Magama - RMT
Nhanga Session in Magaya at RMTECC with Former Chief Mangwende - Tichafa Chibanda

3.4. Supporting the Outreach Work of the Campaign

The AU GWA supported and expanded the campaign outreach formally and informally. She participated in over 9 AU missions as part of monitoring progress on the continent. She also collaborated with national networks such as CECAP in Mozambique, GIMAC, and the Zambia Network on ECM to participate in AU processes. She established connections with rural communities, girls, and women to ensure that these communities were at the center of the campaign. She coordinated these networks, keeping them updated on campaign activities, and creating opportunities for participation in different discussions and events. This effort is exemplified through the work with young women from Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Malawi, including with the Regional Young Women's Network in the SADC region, founded in 2019. She collaborated with Girls Voices Initiative in West Africa which offered a digital storytelling platform for girls to share their stories.

The AU GWA collaborated with the Gender is My Agenda Campaign (GIMAC) promoting the creation of the GIMAC Youth, which has since been institutionalized within the AU. It is a movement of young women who are advocating for the education of girls and the rescue of girls from child marriage, as well as the prevention of child marriage, promoting skill development, and the founding of Women and Girls Clubs.

3.5. Supporting and Accompanying Country Initiatives

The AU GWA assisted and promoted national efforts to end child marriage by member states. She facilitated the drafting of the campaign guidelines and assisted in the launch of national campaigns in Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Ghana.

In Zambia, on top of supporting the launch of the campaign, she contributed to the development of the national strategy for ending child marriage (2016-2021). She also provided guidance and engaged with the Minister of Gender, the Permanent Secretary, and the Directors, and occasionally engaged with the President himself. Her interventions paved the way for local CSOs to advocate for the creation of a strategy and policy documents as indicated by Naver Chayelesa during an in-depth interview, "These documents are now being revised, and within that revision, there is always a desire to continue engaging with her even beyond her mandate because, like I said earlier, her level of expertise, knowledge, and wisdom is unsurpassed."

3.6. AU GWA's Role as a Convener

The AU GWA hosted various meetings and events collaboratively with others. For sustainability and visibility, the AU GWA leveraged many existing networks and relationships such as the GIMAC, the SADC Parliament Forum, Girls Not Brides, the COTLA, Pan African Alliance on Ending Child Marriage, Save the Children, Plan International, and UN Women, Equality Now, AU Special Rapporteur on Women's Rights to co-convene. She also leveraged the work of her organisation, Rozaria Memorial Trust, which provided a solid and systematic support base for the work.

She recommends retaining this role as it offers independence on the mandate. However, the role needs to be strengthened with necessary technical expertise, and a minimum flexible budget. Considering that this is a voluntary role, it is recommended that the AUC has clear institutional arrangements, funding support with partners, and systematic work planning and reporting systems in place.

Chapter Four:

AU GWA's Advocacy Strategies

Credit: Vimbiso Deka - NCDA



4.1. Work Towards Transformative Negative Social Norms through Innovation with Cultural and Traditions

The AU GWA worked closely with UN Women to support the formation of the Council of Traditional Leaders in Africa (COTLA) in Malawi. This has been a way to strategically engage with traditional leaders on the continent and galvanise their leadership and influence towards not only ending child marriages but also other harmful practices such as FGM, the betrothal of young women, and eradicating a culture of tolerance towards violence against women. There is documented evidence that traditional leaders can be effective champions in ending child marriage. This is due to their influence at the community level (in behavioural and attitudinal change among community members) and in their influence on national policies. More importantly, traditional leaders also play a key role in advocating for the implementation of mechanisms which member states have already signed up for.

There are many declarations and statements of general commitments that have come out of various workshops, conferences, and meetings, with and by traditional leaders in the region, which reflect commitment to ending child marriage, FGM, or other harmful practices. However, such declarations are not binding and do not have enforcement mechanisms built-in and therefore do not amount to a Code of Conduct or a by-law. However, the AU GWA was instrumental in developing three such by-laws in Zimbabwe including in the chiefdoms of Magwende, Bushu, and Nyamaropa. In Murewa District these have now been adopted by the full council. She was also instrumental in the drafting of commitments in Uzumba Maramba Pfungwe Districts. Outside of Zimbabwe, she conducted a study which was a comparative analysis of the different by-laws which exist on the continent.

CASE STUDY: Use of the Nhanga Methodology

Since the year 2017, Dr. Gumbonzvanda through RMT introduced, championed, and amplified the Nhanga Concept and methodology in its subnational, national, regional, and international work as part of creating girls' agency and social movement building on education, SRHR, and leadership. In addition, the Nhanga has been an enabling and creating space for young women and girls to influence policies and laws for them to defend and enjoy their rights at sub-national, national, and regional levels.

Nhanga is a cultural innovation of girl and young women-led inter-generational space for mentorship, leadership, and skill building enabling critical conversation, social norm transformation as well as their social and economic empowerment. Girls claiming positive culture is critical to norm shifting.

During the last several years, there has been a concerted effort to research the concept and its cultural underpinnings; and to explore its different uses and modalities. This has been done to necessitate a safe space for girls as they deliberate on different issues that have to do with their lives. She led the development of its theory of change, curriculum, and tools to support the application and movement building.

The AU GWA used the Nhanga to bring leaders and policymakers to sit and LISTEN to the young women at risk and those who experience child marriage, as "soft" accountability, advocacy, and co-creation of solution. This was used at the first AU Girls Summit held in Zambia with President Lungu, in Ghana, and in Niger with Ministers and civil society leaders. AU GWA also convened Nhanga at the Women Deliver conference among others. The methodology has been replicated at the GIMAC Sessions and by girls in countries like Uganda, Sierra Leone, and Zambia and extensively used in Zimbabwe.

4.2. Supporting Law Reform - Aligning traditional and Customary Laws with Regional Standards

The AU GWA effectively contributed to law reform on the minimum age of marriage for several countries including the implementation of the existing laws to prevent child marriage as well as support for survivors.

Initiatives included lobbying and advocacy. Firstly, she was instrumental in lobbying for a marriage law in Zimbabwe aligned with the provisions of the Progressive Constitution of 2013. The marriage bill sought to bring the age of marriage to 18 without exception, recognising liability for those involved in facilitating the marriage on either side including the appointment of traditional leaders as marriage officers. The bill was passed in 2022 with the support of the Girls Not Brides Network, the Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association, and the Women Lawyers of Southern Africa (WLSA) Zimbabwe initiative as well as with the Child Rights Coalition.

Secondly, the AU GWA supported the advocacy for the passage of the Family Union/Law of 2019 in Mozambique which aimed to prohibit, prevent, mitigate, and penalize premature unions or marriages, as well as establish mechanisms to protect children in those unions. In 2022, the Parliament approved a revised Family Law criminalizing marriage of persons under 18 years with the parents' consent.

4.3. Supporting the Agency of Rights Holders: Girls Participation and Empowerment

The AU GWA-ECM has always had a very intentional approach to working with young women, especially girls, when it comes to her advocacy efforts. Be it at a community meeting with local traditional leaders or at the highest-level policy-influencing spaces such as the AU Summit – she has constantly insisted that the rights holders be at the center of discussions and decision-making. Young women's empowerment is an integral part of the journey towards the full realization of girls' rights. For them to be able to stand up for themselves and not only demand their rights but also to step up and adhere to the responsibilities that come with those rights – the first step is for them to realise the power and potential of their voices. As an advocacy strategy, having girls' participation at the center of program and policy design also ensures that they have ownership of the solutions and interventions which will be afforded to them.

Survey Result

"I've had the immense privilege of working alongside and learning from the African Union Goodwill Ambassador on Ending Child "marriage" on various platforms such as the Regional Advisory and Advocacy Group in Southern Africa¹⁰ and PAAECM. This has provided a profound educational experience that has deeply enriched my work and perspective. Perhaps one of the most remarkable aspects of this journey has been the extensive knowledge I've gained by working under the Ambassador's guidance, directly or indirectly. As a young woman in this field, her mentorship has been instrumental in my understanding of the nuances and complexities of the child "marriage" issue.

Her experience and expertise have served as a guiding light, shaping the strategies and approaches I employ to address the problem effectively. I've had the unique opportunity to observe the Ambassador's leadership and learn from her firsthand. Through collaborative experiences, I have witnessed the Ambassador's remarkable ability to influence decision-makers and bring the consequences of child "marriage" to the forefront of global discussions. Advocacy has been a domain where I've closely observed and learned from the Ambassador's influence and presence.

Her unparalleled dedication to advocating at regional and international levels has instilled in me a profound sense of the impact that passionate and informed advocacy can have. Her mentorship through various online platforms and her commitment to young women has motivated me to develop my voice and advocacy skills as I strive to make a lasting difference in the campaign to end child "marriage".

I had the privilege of being part of a group of young women who were able to go to Zimbabwe for an exchange learning experience. The exchange learning visit to RMT was an enlightening learning experience and afforded me the chance to witness the tangible impact of successful initiatives and learn directly from experts in the field. These firsthand encounters have deepened my understanding of child "marriage" and empowered me to implement more effective solutions. On a personal level, the Ambassador has been an unwavering source of inspiration.

Her commitment to the rights and well-being of girls and women has instilled in me a similar dedication to this cause. Her leadership, integrity, and resilience serve as constant reminders that, as a young woman, I have the power to drive meaningful change. Working under her guidance, I am further motivated to continue my efforts to ensure a brighter and more equal future for all."

¹⁰ A consortium of community rooted organisations working in Southern African working on ending child marriage which included NGOCC, CEYECE, RMT, WOLREC among others.

4.4. Using the Mandate to Influence Access to Justice

The mandate of the AU GWA is voluntary but comes with it a few privileges and access which are not available to the ordinary citizen. The mandate holder can access government and political frameworks that can be used to galvanize resources at regional or national levels. There is also funding through civil society for further community participation which helps to create a fundamental legacy in the communities affected.

A: The case of Anna Machaya

There was a national outcry when Anna Machaya passed away while giving birth at the shrine of The Johane Marange Apostolic Faith Church, one of Zimbabwe's most reclusive religious sects. It is believed that the Apostolic Church encourages girls as young as 10 to marry much older men for "spiritual guidance". The practice of child marriage within Zimbabwe's popular Apostolic Church, which frequently rejects medical and hospital treatment, came to light after she passed away while carrying her 26-year-old husband's child. Just 10 days before her death on July 15, 2021, Anna would have turned 15 years old. Because she was allegedly forced to drop out of school to get married, the case has brought attention to the exploitation of minors. In addition to lying about Anna's age, Anna's parents were charged with arranging for their nine-year-old daughter to be married to Hatirarami Momberume.

In a 2016 ruling, the Zimbabwe Constitutional Court outlawed marriage for girls and boys under the age of 18. Zimbabwe has made a commitment to eliminate forced, early, and child marriage by 2030. Additionally, in 1990, it ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which mandates States to set the minimum age of marriage at 18. According to the Zimbabwe Gender Commission report, this story "is just the tip of an iceberg," but it made headlines because of campaigns by civil society organizations and ecumenical groups. Anna's fate is not unlike many other girls who have died in similar circumstances. Others lived, but similarly, their freedom, rights, liberty, and dreams were taken from them. It is impossible to consider long-term solutions to a crisis of this magnitude in a deeply religious setting like Zimbabwe or all of Africa without revisiting the sacred religious texts that influence the detrimental beliefs and customs of faith communities (Mtata, 2022).

The AU Goodwill Ambassador was a strong public advocate for seeking the matter to be urgently addressed by the Justice system, mobilising a broad range of partners to advocate on the case. The advocacy efforts led to the arrest of the perpetrator, and the institution of an Inquiry by the Zimbabwe Gender Commission¹¹ on Child Marriage in Zimbabwe, to which the AU GWA testified and made presentations.

11 Zimbabwe Gender Commission, 2021, <https://zgc.co.zw/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Role-of-Zim-Gender-Commission.pdf>

B: The case of Noura Hussein

A Sudanese girl named Noura Hussein was sentenced to death in May 2018 after a Sharia court, which follows Islamic religious laws, which found her guilty of premeditated murder for stabbing her husband, whom she was forced to marry. In her account, Hussein said her family had forced her to get married at 15 but allowed her to finish school. Three years later, after a public wedding, her husband tried to consummate the marriage. Hussein shared her experience of being forced to live with the man, and how she refused to eat or leave her room in her first days with him. After refusing to have sex with him on their honeymoon, her husband and three of his male relatives raped her nine days after their wedding ceremony.

The case sparked international outrage and several petitions worldwide calling for her sentence to be dropped. Blakeley Decktor, a lawyer at women's rights organization Women's Link, articulates that the decision that was made by the court sends a very dangerous message to society, specifically to women who suffer sexual violence. According to the Thomson Reuters Foundation (2018), the court clearly demonstrated a failure to understand the context in which Noura defended herself and the violence she suffered. Marital rape is not a crime in the predominantly Muslim African nation and the legal age to enter marriage in Sudan is 10 (though children below 10 can also marry with judicial approval).

It was a disproportionate punishment for Noura to be given a sentence for acting in self-defense as she was a victim of violence and brutal attack by her husband. The Sudanese government was supposed to take this as an opportunity to start reforming the laws around child marriage, forced marriage, and marital rape, so that victims are not the ones who are penalized and who suffer because they also have their rights.

Noura Hussein's sentence was subsequently reduced in appeal to five years¹² and she was subsequently released from prison in 2021. The AU GWA joined the #JusticeForNourraHussein campaign and reached out to the AU to use its influence and mechanisms. She also mobilised partners and the CSO Reference Group members, and other networks to offer their public voice and contribute to the many efforts resulting in her release.

12 Al Jazeera, Noura Hussein: Sudan Appeals Court overturns Death Sentence, 26 June 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/6/26/noura-hussein-sudan-appeals-court-overturns-death-sentence>

Chapter Five: Recommendations

Credit: GIMAC



The following are some **key recommendations and insights** in relation to the work of the mandate.

Coordination and Resourcing:

The role and mandate of the AU GWA are important and strategic. However, it is under-resourced - technically and financially. One respondent noted “It should not be a voluntary position but a structure with permanence to enable adequate follow-up and follow through on advocacy efforts with governments. Making it temporary/ rotational makes it seem as if we will wake up soon with child “marriage” gone. We run the risk of retrogressing on gains posted so far”.

Increased resources and financing to fully support all relevant activities including research:

The AU Commission should consider resourcing this role through financing by AU member states, especially when it comes to engagements with the broader African governments, civil society, traditional and community leaders, and other key stakeholders. The challenge of child marriage is greater and requires more holistic approaches where the AU GWA can assert her or his strategic influence to bring about positive change.

Funding from donors to promote their work ambitions and expectations to align with regional priorities:

The AU GWA mandate must be strategically funded for more substantive work to be done. Where the AU is unable to effectively fund, the role should be funded by other partners of the AU, so the impact is not sacrificed.

Collaborate on research projects related to child marriage:

The Ambassador can benefit from organizations’ research findings and data, which can be used to support their advocacy work. The ecosystem of research can contribute to the continental campaign and country initiatives more strategically.

Sustain Campaigns:

Join forces with the Ambassador in public awareness campaigns. Organizations can use their networks and resources to amplify the Ambassador’s message and engage the public in the cause. Maximize and leverage and increase young women as co-champions, community, or national ambassadors.

Clearer Reporting Mechanism:

The AU must develop, resource, and support clearer terms of reporting and accountability for the mandate holder. The independent report supports advocacy work and the advice to AU and to the Member States. The AU GWA should formally submit a report to the STC on Gender or on Social Development and have an annual briefing session with the Commissioner responsible for the Campaign.

Sustain role and momentum:

The AU must sustain the AU Goodwill Ambassador on Ending Child Marriage role and is encouraged to expedite the appointment of a new Goodwill Ambassador after the expiry of the previous Ambassador’s term.

**Support convenings,
including the Girls
Summit:**

AU must continue to sustain the Africa Girls Summit as a strategic covering for social accountability on ending child marriage.

Promote Accountability:

Strengthen implementation of the Accountability Framework on ending Harmful Practices, including reporting to ACERWC, and sustain joint monitoring with other special mandate holders.

Setting Standards:

Contribute to the development of the AU Convention on ending violence against women and girls EVAWG which the former AU Goodwill Ambassador has committed to support.

Building Partnerships:

Strengthen and foster regional partnerships with African institutions and academia, donors, and other stakeholders like the Pan African Alliance on Ending Child Marriages.

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UNFPA database using household surveys DHS and MICS

UNICEF, Child "marriage" database 2020

