



Country fact sheet: Zambia

In 2013 the Government of Zambia launched a nation-wide campaign to end child marriage. Spearheaded by the Ministry of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs, the campaign prioritised engagement with traditional leaders and law reform. In 2015 Zambia started to develop a five year national action plan to end child marriage.

Child marriage prevalence and context

- Zambia has one of the highest child marriage rates in the world, with 42% of women aged 20-24 years married by the age of 18, and 9% married by the age of 15.¹
- Child marriage prevalence varies widely depending on the region, with the highest prevalence in rural areas, especially the Eastern province (60%).
- The rates may even be higher given that birth registration currently stands at 14%² making it difficult to determine the exact age of millions of girls at the time of marriage.
- The minimum age of marriage is 21 for girls and boys under statutory law. However, there are inconsistencies in the legal system, both between different pieces of legislation, and between statutory law and unwritten customary law, which allows girls to be married at puberty.
- The Constitution and Marriage Act are currently under revision to improve the disparities between the two legal systems, which exist in parallel under Zambia's dual legal system.

Background to the campaign development

- Statistics showing high rates of child marriage, teenage pregnancy, HIV and high dropout rates of adolescent girls from school due to pregnancy or child marriage motivated the Government of Zambia to take action to tackle child marriage at scale.³
- The influential Professor Nkanda Luo, then-Minister of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs (MoCTA) is seen as a driving force on Zambia's work on child marriage, at a time when the global agenda and momentum on the issue began to emerge.
- The campaign was led by MoCTA under the leadership of former Minister Professor Nkanda Luo, who has since moved to the Ministry of Gender. MoCTA took the lead due to the influential and powerful roles that chiefs play in Zambia as community gatekeepers, influencing practices within their chiefdoms and its ability to mobilise traditional leaders in all provinces.
- The campaign also involves ten other line ministries, and was supported by international donors including DFID, the Ford Foundation, the Graça Machel Trust, UNICEF, UNFPA and USAID.

¹ Percentage of women aged 20-24 who were married or had entered into union before the age of 15 and 18, as cited by UNICEF, The State of the World's Children 2015

² UNICEF, The State of the World's Children 2015

³ Rate of teenage pregnancy at 28% and school dropout rate of adolescent girls due to pregnancy or child marriage 46%, as cited in Demographic Health Survey Zambia 2007

Campaign development process

- Zambia's campaign has involved the following key milestones:
- The launch of the three year national campaign in April 2013 by the Zambian First Lady Dr. Christine Kaseba Sata with the message "*End child marriage: Let Girls be Girls... Not Brides*".
- A Child Marriage Symposium in July 2014, gathering stakeholders from all ten Zambian provinces, including government representatives, former/current child brides, traditional leaders, Alangizi (traditional counsellors), traditional healers, academia, civil society organisations, youth, media, UN agencies and development partners. The outcomes were:
 - A commitment document to end child marriage signed by ten Cabinet Ministers.
 - The creation of a national network of NGOs against child marriages, which is now an important civil society partner for the government's campaign.⁴
- Leadership from Zambia on the international stage: including Zambia's lead with Canada on the first UN Resolution on Child, Early and Forced marriage in September 2013, and again in November 2014, as well as Zambia's reaffirmed commitment to tackle child marriage multi-sectorally at the high-level Girl Summit in London in July 2014.
- The revision of the Constitution (yet to be finalised by the National Assembly) and existing Marriage Act.

Campaign overview

- The primary focus of the Zambian campaign was on amending the law and engaging traditional leaders. The key objectives of Zambia's campaign were:
 - To empower traditional leaders to become champions and agents of change in their chiefdoms; and
 - To amend relevant laws and policies to ensure that girls are legally protected from child marriage.
- In 2015 a multi-sectoral theory of change is being developed to form part of a national plan of action.

Next steps

- The government's political commitment to the campaign is strong, with support from key actors including the First Lady of Zambia, Professor Nkanda Luo and the current Vice President. However, the campaign's short three year timeframe is soon coming to an end.
- The focus and approach of Zambia's work will soon be guided by a five year national action plan to end child marriage, which is due to be finalised in mid-June 2015.
- A multi-sectoral Technical Committee is currently working to identify priority interventions for discussion at an upcoming stakeholder workshop.

⁴ Chaired by Women and Law in South Africa (WLSA) with its secretariat hosted by Plan International Zambia.